



Commentary

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Linguistic ideologies and the fabric of everyday life

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In her introduction to the papers in this special issue, Miyazaki quotes Garret (2006: 66) to the effect that what is important for any form of socially-inflected linguistics is ‘what speakers do with codes, rather than the codes themselves’. In other words, language and languages are not abstract entities; they are resources which are used by people – and used in specific situations which frame the meanings of the utterances or acts of communication that constitutes this use. It is a commonplace to say that the capacity for language is central to what distinguishes humankind from other species. But a full and nuanced understanding of the role that language plays in the lives of humans – what people do with language, and what language does to people (to paraphrase Blommaert 2005) – is anything but straightforward, and requires detailed research and theoretical innovation. It is this which the papers collected together here aim towards, with a focus on how linguistic ideological research can incorporate the concepts of ‘contact’ and ‘space’ in order to better understand how language is used in the context of the Japanese cultural environment to effect meaningful communication – and how this in turn shapes the culture and environment in which people live.

Within this context, there are two contentions about language as it is understood from a sociolinguistic or linguistic anthropological perspective which can act as anchor points for any analysis and understanding of the way linguistic and other semiotic resources are used in human interactions. The first is Michael Silverstein’s notion of the “total linguistic fact”: the contention that in order to understand linguistic or semiotic meaning-making, the text or utterance with which you begin should be considered as merely one single (albeit important) element in the overall process of communication that takes place between speaker and interlocutor (Silverstein 1985). The process of meaning-making as it is realised in human

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communication is a product of multiple factors, which draw upon interpersonal, environmental, cultural and historical contexts. And to understand how this process takes place in the lives of real individuals one needs to investigate the complex interplay of all these various factors. It is to this end that the papers here take ‘contact’ and ‘space’ – the *how* and the *where* in any interaction – as the vectors for their analysis.

The second contention is Jan Blommaert’s observation that while sociolinguistics can be understood as the study of linguistic diversity and of the relationship between this and social diversity, it always includes a focus on processes of evaluation which inevitably accompany this diversity. Or to put it another way, people do not simply notice difference in the way that others talk and write; they make judgements based upon this perception. The corollary of these processes of evaluation is that all forms of linguistic difference – the existence of regional and social accents, for example, or of different dialects or national varieties – can become instruments in the generation and circulation of linguistic inequality (Blommaert 2020). Sociolinguistics, therefore, is not simply about difference and diversity – it is about how this difference is converted into patterns of social discrimination. To adapt Christopher Brumfit’s famous definition of applied linguistics (1995: 27), sociolinguistics can be understood as the study of real-world incidents of social discrimination in which language plays a central role.

This second contention puts power at the very centre of the discipline. The way language is understood within society is always dependent on some form of hierarchy – a network of distinctions between “good” and “bad”, native and non-native, standard and non-standard, prestigious and non-prestigious and so on. And while power should not always be perceived as intrinsically problematic – it is, after all, essential for getting things done in society – it always has a potentially exploitative element to it. It is this which transforms practices of distinguishing the differences in people’s language use into discriminating between differences in people’s language use. It is this which means that when we hear someone speaking in a form which differs from our own, we ascribe a cultural or social meaning to this difference. And the meaning we ascribe derives from linguistic ideology. It is a truism that power flows through language – and language ideological work has been key to exploring the means by which it does this, and the effects it has on social interaction.

Language ideologies operate at various different levels: from the macro level of national language policies to the micro level of the stylistic decisions people make in everyday linguistic interactions. As with the concept of ideology more generally, language ideologies permeate almost all aspects of language usage, beginning with the way we conceptualise the categories of language wholly and individual languages themselves. Indeed, language ideologies exist in some of their most prominent forms in the ways that national languages are conceptualised. “Japanese”, for example, is a

common-sense term which refers to the main language spoken by the citizens of the nation of Japan, a language which is codified in dictionaries and grammar books, taught as part of a standardised education curriculum, and used as the medium of expression for a native literature. It is a language, in other words, with its own particular cultural and institutional identity – an identity which is built on a distinct set of linguistic patterns which differ from the patterns which constitute other named languages, and one which is ineluctably associated with a particular sense of place – the physical islands that constitute Japan – and the political institutions which exist to oversee governance of society across these islands.

But the ways that Japanese culture and language are conceptualised are not rooted solely in these banner processes of codification, standardisation discourse and policy. As Miyazaki writes (this volume), ‘language ideological processes are formed not only through discourses but also through objects, commodities, channels’ et cetera. As with all situated meaning-making, context is vital – both for the processes of expression, interpretation and interaction, and for the analysis of how such meaning-making is affected. The interplay between language, speakers and context is thus a central object of focus for the ways in which linguistic ideologies flow through and animate social encounters.

An important point in this respect is that “contact” and “space” – the twin focuses for this collection of papers – imply relationality: that is, how interactions and ideologies are shaped or organised by the relational dynamics that exist between individuals, groups and communities, and how these are mediated by objects, commodities and channels. When explicitly articulated, ideologies are very often expressed in contrast with or opposition to alternative ideologies, as well as to the communities who identify with these ideologies. The list of distinctions used to evaluate people’s language use – “good” versus “bad”, native versus non-native, standard versus non-standard, prestigious versus non-prestigious – illustrate just how dependent upon binary oppositions this discourse can be. But as the papers in this collection show, this relational organisation is not by any means limited to such binary distinctions; it also takes place in a myriad of both material and attitudinal ways. For instance, ideologies can be designed into the essential apparatus of everyday life, and language use, along with other forms of social interaction, becomes tied up with the social practices, habits and rituals which come into being around this design.

Nozawa’s paper in this volume details how this is realised through the architectural design of a public business such as a ramen shop, where the partitioning of space directs customers towards a very specific form of interactive behaviour which aligns with a narrative about eating rituals. In this particular case, human interaction, which includes some basic transactional verbal communication, is guided towards a particular set of behaviours by the way the space is organised (with places for diners partitioned into individual booths), and how this organisation limits the

type of contact that is possible between people. This behaviour is then accorded a particular social meaning by the discourse which accompanies it (expressed via signs within the shops and explanations on their website) and which offers a justification for the design choices in terms of their relationship with the dining experience – in this case, the purported importance of seclusion to allow the diner to concentrate fully on the taste of the food. The systemised arrangement of space and contact as a means of governing the sort of communicative interaction that is encouraged on the premises thus works to effectively control the behaviour of customers by establishing and imposing a set of norms for those patronising the restaurant.

It is often the case that relationality takes the form of a contestation of ideologies. A dominant ideology – one which, perhaps, has become the commonsensical understanding of a practice or phenomenon – is subverted by behaviour which indexes a different ideology, and particular acts or elements of communication become the site for cultural-political conflict. An example of this is Miyazaki's study (this volume) of the innovative use of personal pronouns which disrupts the cultural conventions about such usage, and thus open up a space for alternative understandings of gender identity in Japanese society. This example is a particularly interesting indication of how the grammatical affordances of the Japanese language are drawn upon as a resource to subvert traditional ideologies around gender identity. In the Anglophone sphere, the "pronoun" issue is at the vanguard of debates about gender ideology, and one's attitude to pronouns is very often taken as an index of one's stance towards the different sides of the debate over this issue (Jiang et al. 2022). For Anglophone discourse, the site of contestation is specifically third-person-singular pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). In the case of the Japanese junior high school students in Miyazaki's study, on the other hand, it is first-person singular pronouns which become the vehicle for the expression of gender identity (*watashi, boku, ore*, etc.). In both cases, a particular aspect of language is used in an attempt to recalibrate discourse around gender and, in both cases, there are distinct patterns of contact and the employment of space used to facilitate this. In the Anglophone sphere, for example, the practice of indicating the third-person pronouns by which you would prefer to be referred as part of your social media profiles has become common practice to the extent that it is often parodied or satirised by those who hold different political views (Jercich 2019).

It is also worth reminding ourselves at this point that language ideologies are never about language alone, but also other consequential issues in culture and society: issues such as gender, race, national identity, theories of social cohesion, and so on (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). In some cases, one could say that language ideologies are barely about language at all. For example, arguments about language can often act as a proxy for the expression of opinions which, if expressed explicitly, would be viewed as intolerant or discriminatory according to the prevailing norms of

society. Derogatory attitudes about someone's class background can, for instance, be expressed through mockery of their accent. In cases such as this, a stereotype about a particular community is activated in the listener by the sound of a person's accent, and attributes that constitute that stereotype become identified with the individual speaking. For a nuanced understanding of the impact of linguistic ideologies, however, it is necessary to identify where and by whom these stereotypes are invoked, especially when the context in which they're prevalent does not straightforwardly reflect an in-group/out-group dynamic.

Furukawa's paper (this volume) on the way that t-shirts decorated with English language text are used as a prompt for mockery and comedy on a Japanese television show provides a good example of this. The use of foreign language slogans as a design motif on clothing or for tattoos can attract a great deal of evaluative commentary when the content of those slogans appears nonsensical or oddly expressed to speakers with an expertise in that language (e.g., Almog 2020). What is of note in the case examined by Furukawa, however, is that the television programme involves Japanese celebrities shaming the language use (or rather language display) of their compatriots. The contact dynamics between shamer and shamed reveal the way that normative ideologies based on Inner Circle standards have been internalised by the creators and broadcasters of the programme, as also has the ideology that Japanese citizens tend to struggle to learn good English. The entire premise of the programme is thus built on a sense of global linguistic inequality.

In contrast to this, Nakamura's examination (this volume) of how translation for subtitles uses hierarchical distinctions that exist within Japanese grammar to express stereotypical beliefs about other cultures illustrates the subtle ways in which such stereotypes are conveyed and maintained. Here, the speech of non-Japanese cultures is rendered for a Japanese audience in ways which do not simply relate the content of the speech, but which also impose formulaic social and cultural traits on the people speaking. In this way the characters whose speech is translated via subtitles are themselves transformed into caricatures through the invocation of certain language ideologies.

Another intriguing example of the role that relationality plays in the generation of meanings comes in Inoue's paper (this volume) on the use of the utterance-ending phrase *nanchatte* ('as if I were otherwise'). This operates in such a way that conflicting meanings are activated for the utterance by the speaker themselves, so that, in the words of Inoue, the use of *nanchatte*, 'creates, if momentarily, a space-time in which the actual and the virtual coexist and in which worlds of "otherwise" are possible'. In other words, the two language ideologies in conflict here are firstly the belief that what the speaker is saying is truthful or sincere, and secondly that what the speaker should not necessarily be taken as truthful or sincere.

As we can see from these examples, this issue of contact – of one ideologically-informed practice coming into contact with a context in which alternative ideologies are prevalent – and this contact either becoming a site for contestation or being seen as simply the way things are (i. e., being taken for granted) can provide important insights into the nature of a society. Uekusa and Lee's paper (this volume) on the real-life consequences for minority-language speakers of the way a national language ideology affects how communication from the emergency services is conducted provides another striking example. In this case, the national language ideology often incorporates a monolingual ideology (Japanese is the national language of Japan; Japan is a monolingual country) (Heinrich 2012). This is such a prominent part of culture in Japan that, in the words of the authors, those from a minority language community “internalize the linguistic oppression on a daily basis to the extent that they do not even question it”.

In conclusion, if we take a step back we can say that the basic precept behind language ideologies is that the way we think about language plays an important role in the way that language works. One could go as far as to say that the way we think about language is a fundamental part of language itself in that it shapes the process of meaning-making in human interaction. To attempt to track and analyse these ideologies simply by looking at the verbal discourse is to miss the way that such ideologies are embedded in and performed by a wide range of contextual factors, amongst which the ways that space and contact are organised plays a crucial part. Macro linguistic ideologies, such as the notion of Japanese as the national language, play out on the ground in innumerable micro encounters, all of which form part of the fabric of everyday social life.

As a final example, we can perhaps highlight one particularly salient linguistic ideology which shapes this special edition as it does so much applied and sociolinguistics scholarship: the fact that the papers in this collection are written in English for an international journal which uses English as its working language. Miyazaki (this volume) notes how the linguistic anthropology tradition – i. e., the discipline which first cultivated the study of language ideologies – has not, to date, had much uptake in the Japanese scholarly community due, in part, to the fact that the linguistic anthropology community tends to be primarily Anglophone and that there are no dedicated places in which to publish linguistic anthropological studies in Japanese.

There is, therefore, a practical aspect to the decision to write and publish in English: it is convenient for a global community to communicate via a common language, and for various historical and political reasons English has emerged, over the last several decades, as that language. But there are also distinctly ideological implications for this situation. English as the pre-eminent international academic language is an element of the wider phenomenon of ‘global English’, a concept (or macro ideology) which has a profound effect on language and education policies around the

world, as well as on the attitudes, motivations and aspirations of individuals from diverse global communities. This is a topic which has been extensively researched and debated within applied linguistics (e.g., Mortensen and Haberland 2012). But in thinking of space and contact as vectors for our understanding of the use and cultural–political implications of acts of communication, the very medium in which these studies are published indicates how nothing exists beyond the complex of linguistic ideologies and their hierarchical structuring of behaviour which constitutes the culture in which we live and work. Or to put it another way, the guided choices we make over how we communicate about language ideologies – how we analyse, critique and evaluate them – become causal factors in the nature of those ideologies themselves.

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