



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Johnson, Sally and Astrid Ensslin (eds.):** *Language in the Media*. New York and London: Continuum, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-8264-9549-5, 314 pp.

Though the title of the collection might appear ambiguous at first sight, the authors make it clear early on that they are concerned with the metalinguistic dimension of language and discourse representation rather than the analysis of media discourse as such. The ambiguity of the title, however, is a fitting play on words, because all the authors of the individual chapters do, in fact, draw on actual material from diverse kinds of mass media – the printed press, radio and television broadcasts, online chat and hyperpoetry – even though what underlies their common pursuit is not so much where the material comes from as what the subject matter is: the meta-reflection of language and language ideology.

The main aim of the book is, then, to consider how language and language-related issues are represented and constructed in the media and what policies and practices the media apply with respect to language. This research focus stems from the understanding of language as being “itself subject to a process of discursive construction” (8). Closely related to this is the belief that social reality (including linguistic identity) is constituted through performance (cf. Butler 1997) and language use, rather than located in language structure. It is held that the current situation of late modernity (Fairclough 2006) is particularly conducive to the discussion of linguistic reflexivity as well as the constitutive role of metalanguage (Pennycook 2004).

The book grows out of the increased research interest in metalanguage and metadiscourse over the past decade (e.g., Jaworski et al 2004, Hyland 2005, Bublitz and Hübler 2007). It sets out to map the role played by language in modern media texts and practices – where language itself is “thematized” as “the language used to reflect on language within the media texts, and the language used by the producers and/consumers of those texts when talking or writing about them” (6). Its attention is, broadly speaking, metalanguage, i.e., language used to talk about language, as well as the various levels of metalanguage, namely specific comments on language, mention of talk itself, and the shared beliefs about language in a given community (cf. the model offered by Preston 2004). However, the authors programmatically extend their conception of meta-analysis beyond language by incorporating other semiotic codes, such as image and sound. In this way, they reflect the complex multimodal reality of discourse in diverse media contexts (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 2006).

In order to overcome the limitations of the analytical concept of “metalanguage”, the authors adopt Jaworski et al.’s (2004) conception of the “meta-zone”. In this way, they are able to deal with metadiscourse, metapragmatics, metacommunication, metasemiotics and metamediality. Within such a broadly defined meta-zone, they identify, following Woolard (1998), three levels that concern the discursive representation and construction of language ideologies: linguistic/discursive practice (what people *do* with language), metalinguistic/metadiscursive practice (what people *say* about language), and implicit metapragmatics (the knowledge that people *draw on* when using and interpreting language) (10). While the first two areas concern the actual language used to refer to

language and linguistic analyses of language and discourse, respectively, the latter is concerned with the actual ideologies that can be revealed through implicit linguistic signals.

The book is divided into four sections with three chapters each. Part I “Metaphors and Meanings”, deals with the representation of language in print media. The section opens with John Heywood and Elena Semino’s text on metaphors for speaking and writing in the British press. Applying conceptual metaphor theory, they reveal how verbal communication is constructed metaphorically through source domains connected with the manipulation of physical objects, enabling vision, moving towards a destination, and physically attacking someone. The data reveals that such metaphors, particularly in news stories about communicative acts, are often used rhetorically by journalists in order to “dramatize and sensationalize utterances and texts in order to emphasize their newsworthiness and keep the reader’s attention” (46).

Lesley Jeffries provides a metapragmatic analysis of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s alleged apology for the intelligence leading to the Iraq War. After defining the performative speech act of an apology and identifying its salient components in English, she puts Blair’s words to the test in view of the metadiscussion of this public apology by media journalists. It is argued that producers of media messages wield the often overlooked “power to *mediate* the interpretation of a speech act” (57) and, consequently, can “shape the conditions of acceptance (or otherwise) of the apology, most obviously on behalf of the public” (56). It appears from the analysis that an apology is not considered an “all-or-nothing act” but rather a cline with many intermediary stages ranging from what media commentators interpret as prototypical apologies to no apologies at all. In the case in point, Blair offers an apology without saying that he is sorry, thus avoiding any personal blame. In terms of the linguistic features of a prototypical apology, Blair’s speech – though not a complete “non-apology” – is rather untypical, if only because it lacks the crucial interactive element for an apology to be successful, namely acceptance. It turns out that his speech act can be – and has been – interpreted as a boast rather than an apology.

The section on printed media is concluded by Jane H. Hill’s anthropologically-oriented text on personalist language ideology in US media discourse. She deals with “crises of meaning” – when lies and misstatements by public figures cause moral panics about the status of their utterances and the uncertainty about whether they are genuinely meant or not. Personalist ideology is understood as the belief that one’s inner self – intentions, emotions and attitudes – is manifested through a person’s utterances. This means that “meanings that emanate from these psychological states of speakers will, in the default case, match the reality of the world” (70). Moral panic may arise, for instance, where public figures deny their offensive or racist statements on the grounds that they did not “mean it”, which conflicts with the personalist ideology held by the public that “language is meaningful because speakers say what they believe, and they believe what is true” (78). However, personalist ideology works in excusing utterances that evoke negative stereotypes about others on the grounds that they are not “meant” (85). Media commentators will then often defend people who make racist statements by giving them a “free pass”.

Part II, “National Identities, Citizenship and Globalization”, traces media debates on various language ideologies in several European countries. Sally Johnson describes the way German spelling reform has been multimodally represented in the news magazine *Der Spiegel*. She focuses on the metadiscursive representation of the orthography issue on the front page where it is – perhaps unexpectedly – represented in a visual manner. Using elements of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar, Johnson analyzes the representation of social actors, the positioning of the viewer, modality, etc., concluding that the image actually frames the debate in terms of “a dispute over authority, democracy and German national identity as a whole” (102). Orthography is interpreted as providing a symbolic link between language and identity, functioning metonymically – by indexing language and culture as a whole. Spelling is far more than a part of the language system: it is a metaphor incorporating such complex issues as power, control and conformity. As a result, it also stands as evidence of political, social and cultural contexts.

Tommaso M. Milani focuses on language ideologies surrounding the recent media debates about the introduction of compulsory language testing of immigrants in Sweden. The issue of language tests as a condition for the naturalization process of immigrants is analyzed on a set of diverse media

texts that reveal that the ideology of language testing and Swedish citizenship have many symbolic dimensions. From the perspective of educational discourse, the recognition of a test of Swedish language skills would actually increase the prestige of Swedish as symbolic capital. From the perspective of economic discourse, the tests become linked with the employability of immigrants: the tests (rather than the actual knowledge of the language) are seen as prerequisites for entry into the labour market. The link is discursively used to substantiate the argument that the tests themselves are reasonable and indispensable. Milani concludes that tests are deeply ideological in that they can, “regardless of their actual effects, [...] be employed as the tangible manifestation of a political will to take measures against certain educational, social or economic problems in a given society” (124).

Considering the issue of language and education in the Luxemburg press, Kristine Horner argues that language ideologies and nationalist ideologies are closely intertwined. In Luxemburg, there are public discourses that strive to construct a unified, ethnically-based nation, whose members are united in their use of the mother tongue, Luxembourgish, as well as in the so-called trilingual ideal (i.e., the ability to use Luxembourgish, standard German, and standard French) that is propounded in official ideology and boosted through school education. These notions are, in turn, invoked in the construction of boundaries between “us” and “them”, e.g. identifying the local citizens as “good Europeans”. Occasionally, the trilingual ideal is backgrounded in situations where the mother tongue is equated with “our” tongue (e.g., in historical contexts or in recent media debates over the results of international student assessment results), with the “one nation, one language ideology” prevailing. At other times, the decrease of trilingualism is interpreted as a threat to national and ethnic identity, i.e., a possible loss of the distinction between “us” and “foreigners”. Both ideologies, i.e., the mother tongue and the trilingual ideal, can thus – when needed – be used to construct the “other”.

A similar topic is taken up in Part III, “Contact and Codeswitching in Multilingual Media-scapes”, which shows how speakers can, through the use of multiple codes, strategically construct ingroups and outgroups.

Alexandra Jaffe describes the use of Corsican in radio and TV broadcasts. She focuses on the public construction of the language and on how it extends into domains that had previously been associated with the use of French. Such use is understood as a cultural and political statement connected with the revitalization efforts of the past decades. It appears that the media strive to create a “‘pure’ Corsican linguistic space” in news reports (155). While relying on neologisms as well as translations from French, media professionals draw on the multiple linguistic resources available to them. Perhaps not surprisingly, they are hardly consistent in their attempts. However, the mixing of codes – which reflects the linguistic reality in Corsica more effectively – is more common in less formal media formats. As regards TV, Jaffe provides an analysis of a recent programme on bilingual education that failed to capture the complex linguistic reality. Instead, it presented a local bilingual school essentially as a “site of two coexisting monolingualisms” (170); the media representations demonstrate bilingualism through the maximal use of Corsican, normalizing the use of the language as an academic register.

Helen Kelly-Holmes and David Atkinson explore the use of English/Irish bilingualism in radio satire. Irish is a frequent topic in the local media since it underlies a symbolic distinction between the local community and outsiders, performing an integrative function, as is common with many minority languages. Media discussions of Irish reveal a pattern of attitudes and ideologies that can be arranged along two continua: the competence and the status scales. The status scale, for instance, ranges from the superiority attitude (articulated in nationalist/esthetic, etc., terms) to the inferiority belief (i.e., ‘Irish as a waste of time’, etc.) (178). As the authors’ analysis of the language used in a satirical show indicates, what matters are the ideological interpretations of such a practice, e.g., the interface between the competence continuum and prescriptive attitudes, and the exploitation of both ends of the status continuum in the media, where the superiority/inferiority attitudes complement and counterbalance each other, often for humorous purposes or with the aim of performing identity work, e.g., excluding outsiders.

Simon Gieve and Julie Norton provide a novel perspective on participant frameworks in British television programmes. Noting the media’s tendency to minimize the effects of linguistic differ-

ence, they suggest a triangular model to represent the relationship between the media protagonists, foreign language speakers and the audience, and to account for the directions in which linguistic difference is mediated. Eight strategies for dealing with linguistic difference are identified: omission of encounters across linguistic difference, overheard foreign language talk, protagonist-other talk in English, non-verbal engagement, 'getting by' across linguistic difference, mediated interaction, protagonist-other talk in a foreign language, and pseudo-interaction. Data reveal that British television tends to avoid interactions across linguistic difference, thereby minimizing the exposure of their audiences to linguistic otherness. Occasionally, non-native speakers become reduced to passive "props" who are merely being communicated about. Since the viewing public has "access as an audience [...] to a simplified, reduced, heavily mediated voice of the FL speakers", it may develop "the impression that it is not really worth the effort to communicate with such speakers" (210).

Part IV, "Youth, Gender and Cyber-Identities", opens with Crispin Thurlow's discussion of media discourse on young people's new-media language. He argues that, through such discourse, adults not only construct adolescence but also construct themselves as adults. The adult discourses position young people unfairly; relying on several metadiscursive themes. First, homogenization of youth is a way of depicting young people "uniformly and almost solely in terms of its use of information technologies" (219). Second, their language is presented as de-generated and "framed as an attack against conventional or 'correct' orthography and 'proper' spelling" (220). Third, linguistic difference is exaggerated: the technologized youth is assigned unintelligible language that is inaccessible to adults. Thurlow interprets this metadiscourse as a way of reproducing the social order. Young people are caught up in a double bind: on the one hand, they are subject to constant othering; but, on the other, they are commodified as consumers.

Deborah Cameron considers how language stereotypes about gender are taken up by the media in articles popularizing science. Language research becomes the subject of media coverage typically when its findings can be framed through popular language ideologies. In a case study on bloggers' responses to "Gender Genie", an interactive website that tries to predict a person's gender on the basis of a submitted text sample, Cameron shows that much of the bloggers' discussion is dominated by traditional, folk linguistic, common sense language ideologies. The discussions, then, mostly reflect the outmoded "difference model", perpetuating the belief that men and women write differently.

In the last paper, Astrid Ensslin deals with the metalinguistics of hyperpoetry, i.e., digital verse that draws on not only language but other digitized semiotic modes as well. After giving several examples of metalinguistic representations in hyperpoetry, Ensslin suggests that "hyperpoetry aesthetizes the representation of language by both drawing on and invoking language as an art form in its own right" (266). Such aesthetic metalanguage creates a secondary layer of reality, within which artists implicitly comment on various meta-issues and rely on the readers' inferences to communicate meanings.

Taken together, the papers in the collection show that issues of meta-language are, indeed, much more central to one's linguistic experience (or even existence) than might appear at first sight. As Adam Jaworski points out in his commentary to the volume, "all language use is in some way metalinguistic in that its production and interpretation depend on the successful deployment and uptake of what has been variously referred to as the framing and keying strategies, contextualization cues, metamessages, code-orientation [etc.]" (271). Clearly, researchers within this emerging field are united by their interest in the reflexive nature of language rather than some common methodology. This orientation calls for an inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach to the data under analysis, leading to novel findings and interpretations arrived at as a result of the juxtapositions and points of contact between various disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, language policy, anthropology, etc. What the volume proves is that the meta-zone is certainly a worthwhile area for linguistic investigation, particularly as far as the interactive and ideological dimensions of language use are concerned – language use in personal and group identity construction, the politics of standardization and multilingualism, and many other areas where language representation constitutes linguistic reality. In this sense, it is not so much the use of language

alone that is constitutive of identities and social relations as the “ideological interpretations of such uses of language [that] always mediate these effects” (Woolard 1998: 18).

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