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Revisiting Theory and Method in Language Ideology Research

It is now some decades since the study of "linguistic ideology" was first proposed (Silverstein 1979), and the time is ripe for taking stock. This article considers some developments in this field as it has emerged and, in some respects, become normalized. Yet, normalized *can mean* backgrounded*, taken for granted—perhaps obscuring important theoretical issues and methodological challenges. I revisit what is entailed by "ideology"; the debate between explicit and implicit sources of evidence (and why this binary is itself problematic); issues of ideological multiplicity and dominance; and questions such as: Must ideology be internally consistent? Why turn to semiotics, and should "language ideology" then be re-labeled "semiotic ideology"? Are ideologies big programs, distinct from local metapragmatic activity? I address these questions while making methodological recommendations about research sites, contrasts and boundaries, attention to flows and connections, and a "centerpiece" method for tracing ideological work. An extended example concerning sociolinguistic variation in Maryland illustrates the discussion.* [language ideology, method, yheory]

It is now some decades since the study of language ideology began to gather momentum in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and allied fields. For me, the topic is "bookended"—spanned—by Michael Silverstein's 1979 essay, "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology," and the book Susan Gal and I published in 2019, *Signs of Difference*. So, forty years. While the concept of "ideology" is much older, the focus on *language* ideology that accelerated since the 1970's is what is relevant here. On that body of work, the time is ripe for taking stock. This paper considers some of the developments in this field as it has emerged and, in some respects, become normalized. Yet, *normalized* can mean *backgrounded,* taken for granted, and when that happens it can obscure important theoretical issues and methodological challenges. I offer a personal perspective on these matters and consider where we are now, and where we can go from here. Spoiler alert: this is not a full-fledged review of the literature. Instead, it tracks my own trajectory and some of the works that have influenced it.

Before plunging into the theoretical thickets, I will open with an example, and revisit it now and then throughout my discussion. Because this essay is not primarily the report of an empirical study, the example is just to allow me to illustrate some points informally, not to demonstrate anything. It relates to speech varieties in Maryland, that East Coast state that includes the city of Baltimore. That is where I was born, but I have not lived there for many decades.[1] Planning a simple start to looking at speech varieties there by glancing at what other people thought -- not language experts particularly -- who had been in Maryland more recently than I had,

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I asked Google, "What accent(s) are there in Maryland?" Right away several threads came up, plus a Wikipedia entry.

Here's the beginning of a 2020 Reddit thread that came up at the beginning of my search and extends into a longer online discussion. I have deleted the contributors' online "handles," instead representing separate authors by em-dashes:

> — I am originally from MD but I moved as a teen to NY and some people tell me I have a southern accent and some say a neutral accent. I am from Montgomery County (if that helps).
>
> — We don't have one accent. The Shore, Baltimore area, and the west are all pretty distinct regions with narrow geographical borders.
>
> — But on that note: "Check oat all that wudder the far-truck is spraying."
>
> — . . .I do notice if a Marylander does go up north like NY or MA people will pick up on the "southness" in your speech no matter how slight.

The entries in this thread all continue in the same vein: specifying geographical locations, often at the county level; parodying Maryland speech; and alluding to Southernness, especially if someone goes "up north". To illustrate these points, here is a longer version of the thread. I've put the bits about Maryland counties and regions in boldface type; the bits about southern speech are underlined; and the parody bits are in italics:

> — I am originally from MD but I moved as a teen to NY and some people tell me I have a southern accent and some say a neutral accent. I am from **Montgomery County** (if that helps).
>
> — We don't have one accent. **The Shore, Baltimore area, and the west** are all pretty **distinct regions with narrow geographical borders**.
>
> — But on that note: *"Check oat all that wudder the far-truck is spraying."*
>
> — . . .I do notice if a Marylander does go up north like NY or MA people will pick up on the "southness" in your speech no matter how slight.
>
> — Same here, there's a bit of South here and there, but most of the comments are when I'm talking about technology. Anybody who came in from out of state tells me I pronounce it *Dee ness* and *Gewgle*.
>
> — I'm a lifelong Annapolis resident with family from all over MD so here's my take: **Baltimore, Bal[timore] Co{unty], Carroll, Frederick, Hartford, Cecil and some of Howard and northern A[nne] A[rundel]** - Baltimorese (which I think is mostly southern, but influenced by some northern immigrant dialects). South of route 50 and **Eastern Shore**—average tidewater southern accent with some baltimorese mixed in (plus some waterman style dialects) **MoCo and most of HoCo** -- generic American/no accent. **west of Frederick Appalachian** southern mixed with baltimorese and Pittsburgh.
>
> [MoCo = Montgomery County, HoCo = Howard County]

In Map 1, you can see the counties and the bay that separates the Eastern Shore from the rest.

Two other threads I looked at were similar. One of them delved deeply into the history of the American Civil War (1861-65), which pitted North against South. The other thread tilted more negative, with comments like "one of the most annoying things I hear," and "Oh lord, this is the worst." Meanwhile, however, the Wikipedia entry was quite different.[2] Here is the beginning of the entry, its first two paragraphs. Rather than discussing the state as a whole, it focuses on the city of Baltimore:

> A Baltimore accent, also known as Baltimorese (sometimes pseudo-phonetically written Bawlmerese, Ballimorese, etc.), commonly refers to an accent that originates among blue-collar residents of South and Southeast Baltimore, Maryland. It is a sub-variety of Mid-Atlantic American English, as is nearby Philadelphia English.
>
> At the same time, there is considerable linguistic diversity within Baltimore, which complicates the notion of a singular "Baltimore accent." According to linguists, the accent and dialect of African American Baltimoreans are different from the "hon" variety that is popularized in the media as being spoken by white blue-collar Baltimoreans. White working-class families who migrated out of Baltimore city along the Maryland route 140 and Maryland Route 26 corridors brought local pronunciations with them. . .

Notice that the entry calls attention to the linguistic variety spoken by African Americans in Baltimore, as compared with a variety associated with white blue-collar speakers. Notice, too, that the entry seems to be informed by academic sociolinguistics, as suggested by the appeal to the authority of "linguists," and expressions such as "linguistic diversity within Baltimore." That impression was confirmed for me later in the entry, by mentions of "Canadian raising" and terms like "non-rhotic speech." It turns out that the original version of this entry was composed by students in Christine Mallinson's sociolinguistics class at the University of Maryland—Baltimore County.

What to make of these excerpts? Obviously, their contributors have different backgrounds and reasons for writing. Beyond that, for now— I will return to them later—just observe that they emphasize different things. The internet threads emphasize subregional geography, history, and "southernness"; the Wikipedia entry emphasizes urban class and racial divisions. This is still a very superficial comparison, though. I will come back to it after embarking on a more theoretical discussion of studies of language ideology, which will require us to take several steps back from Maryland "accents" before we can look at them again.

Map 1. County Map of Maryland. ©MapSherpa Inc. Reproduced by permission [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

For this more theoretical discussion, it is useful to look at some major issues that emerge from the early definitions and foundational statements about "language ideology," "linguistic ideology," and "ideology of language." What seemed to be important initially, and what has become of these issues in the meantime? What was missing, what remains a problem, and what might we understand better now? What can be recommended for future research in this field?

To start with, then, some early definitions. In an article for the *Annual Review of Anthropology* in 1994, Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin reviewed works in the field so far. They distinguished among three definitions of "linguistic ideology" (as Michael Silverstein called it) and "language ideology" or "ideology of language," expressions some other authors have used. The differences among these definitions already point toward some important issues and debates. Silverstein wrote that "ideologies about language, or linguistic ideologies, are any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (1979, 193). Woolard and Schieffelin compared his statement with two others that they found had a "greater social emphasis" (1994, 57): Shirley Heath's definition of "language ideology" as "the self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group" (Heath 1977, 53); and my own contribution, "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests (Irvine 1989, 255).[3] Finally, Woolard and Schieffelin added Alan Rumsey's explanation of "linguistic ideology" as "shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world" (Rumsey 1990, 346).

Most obviously there is a difference in label, between "linguistic ideology" and "language ideology." Initially this difference may have mattered. Heath's work treated language ideology as related to the politics of states, institutions, and large-scale interest groups; it is the "a priori language policy," the twin of other kinds of policy that are more conspicuously political. Silverstein's statement in his 1979 paper, on the other hand, looked to linguistics as a discipline, focusing on linguists' treatment of reference and grammatical structure. But the difference in labeling has evaporated. Many authors have used these labels interchangeably, or at least without trying to distinguish them.

There are other differences among these definitions, however. An important one concerns the locus of the ideas at issue. Heath locates "language ideology" in the background, as opposed to explicit statements of policy; in her version language ideology is a cognitive map, consisting of largely unconscious assumptions, not asserted rationalizations. Silverstein's "linguistic ideology," on the other hand, is in the foreground, articulated by speakers to rationalize or justify their actions. So, his version is conscious and explicit. It is based on speakers' conscious perceptions, as opposed to unconscious or unnoticed structures of language and usage. In the difference between these two definitions, there are important methodological issues at stake. Does one look for ideology in explicit metalinguistic and metapragmatic assertions, or is that precisely the wrong place to look? (Neither Rumsey nor I committed ourselves on that question.)

Finally, something that is not obvious in any of these early definitions, although it became important later, is how ideology relates to social positioning and differences in point of view. Difference, at least among the "users" of a language, is not explicitly addressed in any of these definitional statements and might even seem to be excluded—although Paul Kroskrity, noting the importance of ideological multiplicity in a later review of the field, suggested that the definition in Irvine 1989 did incorporate it because of the mention of social relationships and political interests (Kroskrity 2004, 497). "Political interests" does have that implication of multiplicity, while not asserting it overtly. Still, even if difference is not focused on directly in these early statements of what "linguistic/language ideology" is, difference is in some sense implicit in the very term "ideology" itself, as I will explain.

But first, why "ideology," anyway? At the time of these foundational statements, what made the concept of *ideology* appealing was that it offered a way to link some system of ideas with politics and power. By the late 1980's, linguistic anthropology had developed a strong interest in political economy and power relations (and came close to "Critical Discourse Analysis" in this respect). Yet, "ideology" as a term had some other implications, especially—though not exclusively—the connotation of "false consciousness." "Ideology," rather like "accents," was something other people had. For example, in the Cold War years, "ideology" in this sense was how each side—the capitalist West and the Soviet East—described each other's ideas and programs. Silverstein's 1979 work treated "linguistic ideology" in this way too. The false consciousness he criticized in that paper was the blinkered belief system of those linguists who saw language as nothing but reference-and-predication, shorn of any social indexicality or pragmatic force, and representing a world exterior to language—a world knowable in some absolute sense without considering the language that, the linguists supposed, merely labeled it. In contrast, Silverstein set to work rehabilitating the intellectual reputation of Benjamin Lee Whorf.

Still, what does it mean to claim that someone, or some group, has ideas about the world that can be characterized—and dismissed—as false consciousness? Does it imply that we, in contrast, have some special corner on the truth? If so, it should inspire some uneasiness. Many scholars today feel uncomfortable laying claim to absolute truth, even if truth is what we seek. Moreover, as Terry Eagleton (2007) has pointed out, if some view of the world were utterly false, nobody who believed it could survive. There must be some way in which a system of ideas connects with a real world. So, only part of the view can be false. Or the believers must only partly believe it.

There is another lesson, too, from the Cold War usages. Beyond its connection with power, the term "ideology" also implies that no matter how totalizing a system of ideas might seem to be—how well it seems to encompass an entire world—it always posits that there is some other set of ideas that differs, or some group of infidels who fail to believe. This implicit contrast with some other set of ideas is in a way the concept's strength, because it entails difference and comparison; but the supposed connection with falsehood is also why the term "ideology" is enduringly problematic.

One way to address this matter is to conceive of ideology as partial: a partial view of the world, incomplete because there are other ways of viewing it; but also partial in the sense of (politically) interested, coming from a specifiable subject position with a point of view and projects for social action. This conception of ideology does not make it necessarily evil or delusional. Moreover, if "ideology" is incomplete, positioned, and politically interested, then it offers an alternative to the term "culture," which may suggest homogeneity and completeness, and does not necessarily entail anything about social position, power, or politics. In fact, one reason I have favored "ideology" as a useful concept is that there's nothing better on these points.

Now, let us return for a moment to the Maryland example, which certainly illustrates different points of view on the same (or overlapping) object. One of these perspectives, the Wikipedia one, can marshal technical knowledge of phonetics in aid of its presentation, as it does in a later part of the entry. But to say that the folk descriptions and more casual, naive commentaries, were "false" would itself be misleading. Among other things, it would miss some important things about what language differences the lay-persons notice (such as linguistic traces of "southern-ness")—and it would miss what those differences imply *to them*. The two points of view, academic and folk, may concern the same object (or, partly the same object), but for different reasons.

Moving away from Maryland again for a while, let us turn, as linguistic anthropologists did by the 1990's, to the question of how language ideology relates to power and dominance. How does that work? Do more powerful people and less powerful people (to oversimplify the contrast) necessarily differ in ideology, or only

in opportunities to achieve their goals? How do ideologized constructs relate to action, practices, and history?

Questions about dominance and multiplicity were an important concern for many of the authors who contributed to edited collections on language ideologies that appeared at the end of the 1990s.[4] Were some people—the less powerful—totally hoodwinked, blindly accepting principles of language and interaction that worked to their disadvantage? Some scholars thought so, if in less exaggerated terms. For example, in a 1998 volume, Paul Kroskrity argued that the concept of *ideology* applies best to successfully "naturalized" beliefs and practices that are never publicly challenged and (he maintained) seldom enter members' discursive consciousness. Describing language ideology among Arizona Tewa, Kroskrity showed that ritual speech in the kiva was taken for granted as a prestige model for everyday conduct (Kroskrity 1998, 117). Other contributors to the same 1998 volume, however, presented evidence of counterdiscourses. Jane Hill, writing on Mexicanos (Nahuatl), and Charles Briggs, writing on Warao, each identified contexts in which elite men's discourses were challenged by non-elite men and women (Briggs 1998; Hill 1998). Briggs argued that there is always contestation because it is inherent to how dominance is created (Briggs 1998; Hill 1998). And in the same volume, Susan Gal called attention to instabilities and incoherences in ideologies and in social relations, and to how you conceive of power (Gal 1998).

These scholarly disagreements at the end of the 1990s brought to the fore the fundamental methodological issues that were already lurking, I have suggested, in initial definitions of language ideology. To what extent do precepts about language and linguistic practice get manifested in explicit texts and discourse, i.e., metadiscourse? Who articulates them, in what settings, and in what terms? (Silverstein asked these very questions in his commentary to a set of papers in the same 1998 collection; Silverstein 1998.) These problems were already in the air. In 1995, Jef Verschueren had framed them as the relation between explicit and implicit meanings, which combine in various ways. Ideology incorporates both, he proposed (1995, 142), but the implicit ones are harder for researchers to identify. Now if you look at Verschueren's paper you will see that it is more complex and nuanced than this. But many other people have contrasted "explicit" and "implicit" meanings as if they were a simple binary, and this simplification is unhelpful. Does it mean distinguishing (explicit) true/false assertions like "persons X speak in manner Y" from everything else? "Everything else" covers too much ground. It includes such varied possibilities as: the many metapragmatic and metalinguistic terms that occur in all sorts of constructions, not just in True/False assertions; the presuppositions and implicatures that can be tracked in and between utterances; the presence or absence of uptake; and the possible implications of a person's making the assertion at all. These are very different things.

To see some of the pitfalls, suppose we tried to apply this binary to the Maryland speech material. In the Reddit thread, authors explicitly identify "accents" with geographical regions and political units (counties within the state), and they discuss "southernness" as an important aspect of speech and other things. I will have more to say about that; but meanwhile, what to do about all the parodies in these threads? (I have provided only a glimpse; the threads have long stretches of parody, represented pseudo-phonetically and sometimes accompanied by a conventionally-spelled version of the same word, just in case the reader mistook parody for ignorance: for example, *Merlin* vs. *Maryland*; *Bawlmer* vs. *Baltimore*; *far* vs *fire*.) Is a parody implicit or explicit? It's double-voiced, of course, to use Bakhtin's term, as reported speech is too. And what to do about the quick move, in another thread, from "southern accents" to grocery stores? There is an implicature that makes this move, which comes right after a comment on "southern accents," be understood as coherent:[5]

> The **people who told me I had an accent** didn't [seem to me to] have an accent. They could have grown up down the street from me, at least according to my accent-impaired ears.

Actually, one was even a Marylander. As for Maryland being a Southern state. It is and it isn't. But I figure **any place where you can regularly find grits**[6] **in the grocery store has to be at least a bit Southern**.

A simple binary contrast between implicit and explicit discourse will not be enough to account for these things.

In real life, or at least in video data, a researcher may also want to consider the raised eyebrow expressing doubt, the head shakes and other gestures, the silences expressing lack of uptake of someone's statement, and so on. All these may be sources of evidence about what people take to be important in communicative acts, how and what they value or dislike or ignore, and what they assume about speakers, activities, and contexts of talk.

The relevance of these nonverbal aspects of communication raises questions about whether "ideology of language" should be replaced by some more capacious object of inquiry, such as "semiotic ideology," a label Webb Keane has proposed (Keane 2003, 2007, and elsewhere). Why "language", anyway? Obviously, language is what interests those of us who identify as linguistic anthropologists or sociolinguists. And maybe a focus on ideologies about language would be fruitful for investigating ideology about anything else—which might turn out to be about language, too. But our personal preoccupations do not suffice to answer the larger question. For now, my point in raising it is to unsettle a common assumption about language: the assumption that language is a discrete, bounded object. As the gestures that accompany talk attest, language in use is not bounded off from other semiotic modalities. Indeed, to isolate it, to draw a boundary between language and the world of social and material life in which it occurs, is itself an ideological move (whose roots can be traced in European intellectual and religious history).

Noting the ideological moves that might be underwriting a concept of "language ideology" as bounded and distinctive, Keane (2003, 2007) suggested that "semiotic ideology" is broader, more neutral, and not tied to that European history. He is certainly right about this. And yet, within a wide semiotic ocean one may still wish to pick out language, or something about language, as a vantage point from which to scan multiple semiotic relationships while retaining some concern for linguistic specificities. Moreover, it is language's reflexivity—its capacity to refer to itself, among all the other phenomena it so pervasively refers to—that underlies metapragmatics (and other things meta-). This fact, I believe, privileges language for the study of ideology in social life. In our zeal to explore deixis and indexicalities we linguistic anthropologists have sometimes ignored that referential function, sometimes to our analyses' detriment. I prefer, therefore, to keep linguistic signs at the center of my investigations, while not bounding them off from their myriad connections with other kinds of signs—bodily gestures and postures, clothing, script forms, spatial arrangements, and so on. How to do this without reinscribing the old binary of words and things remains a problem, but it is more a methodological problem than a terminological one. I shall return to these questions.

Regardless of labels for our field of inquiry, these considerations about the place of language in semiotics have led many of us to distance ourselves from a Saussurean model of the linguistic sign (as presented in Saussure 1916), in favor of a model from Charles Sanders Peirce, which opens into a broader semiotics (see Peirce 1955). In contrast to the Saussurean model, Peircean semiotics is not limited to linguistic signs, but instead concerns signs of all kinds. For instance, a simple quality (such as redness) can be taken as a sign of something (perhaps ripeness, if it's redness in fruit; or inflammation, if it's redness in bodily tissues). This model allows sign relations to be grounded in a material world. For these reasons a Peircean semiotics unsettles any conception of language that rests on the Saussurean antinomies that locate linguistic sign-relations as mental phenomena, and isolate linguistic signs from any other kinds. Figure 1 illustrates the difference between the two models.

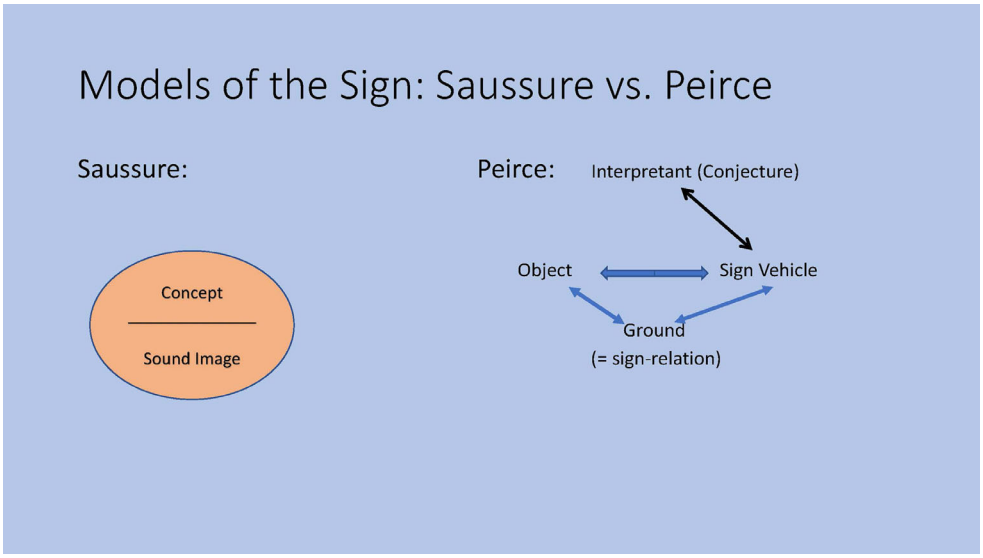

Figure 1. Models of the Sign: Saussure and Peirce. (On Interpretant as "Conjecture," see Gal and Irvine 2019:14-21, 87-107) [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

In a paper we published in 2000, Susan Gal and I delved into the Peircean typology of sign-relations—drawing on more of it than was then usual in our field—in order to combine a Peircean approach with a focus on differentiations, contrasts, and comparisons (Irvine and Gal 2000).[7] Notice that this focus on contrasts and comparisons preserves an aspect of Saussure's thought that stands apart from his famous antinomies: his concept of value (see Saussure, 1966, 105). That is, it puts the Peircean sign into conversation with the Saussurean idea about contrastive relations among signs, such that a sign is constituted not only in its own ingredients but also in its relations with other signs—its absent alternatives. Beyond this, however, and certainly beyond Saussure, Gal and I wanted also to attend to processes and action, placing people's sign activity in their social projects and in the contingencies of history, in which we all live.[8]

I will follow our collaborative work forward now, toward the present. To illustrate the discussion, the extended example of the Maryland speech material remains convenient.

First, go back to the Reddit thread and notice some of the many indexicalities and contrasts drawn by contributors there. The pronunciations they discuss index Maryland, of course; that is, they are associated with speakers living in that state, and so can serve as (indexical) signs of those speakers and therefore that state. As I noted earlier, the pronunciations are also taken to index narrower spaces—regions, counties, and cities (Baltimore, Annapolis)—and spaces larger than Maryland, especially the American "South." That "South," which the Maryland pronunciation indexes (points to), contrasts with "up north like NY [New York] or MA [Massachusetts]". But a "southern accent" also contrasts with something termed a "neutral accent": "Some people tell me I have a southern accent and some say a neutral accent," writes the Reddit author. In fact, all the parodies and examples of Maryland pronunciation that the Reddit authors offer (or try to offer) by means of spellings that diverge from standard, implicitly contrast with something "neutral" or standard to which these authors also seem to lay claim. Some authors even display scorn for the Maryland version. Here's a particularly strong entry, giving examples of words Marylanders say (these are just the first three in a longer list):[9]

> "Eggs; Many people in Maryland, especially Baltimore, pronounce this word as "aye-gs." Personally it's one of the most annoying things I hear.

> Fire: Often sortened [*sic*; = softened? shortened?] down to "far" with an accent on the A. Beats me why it's so hard to say a 4-letter word.
>
> Water; Oh lord, this is the worst. People say "wooder" or sometimes even "wurter." Yikes."

Although this author's opinion is more extreme than others, all the thread authors take a stance that displays their control of educated spellings, and —even if they are characterizing their own speech—they distance themselves from the kind of speaker who would speak that way unreflectively. So, they are not just describing or referring to ways of speaking; they are also projecting an image of themselves, one that would contrast with some other kinds of people.

We can think of their behavior here as involving a kind of project, a kind of social action in which the authors in the thread create sociable alliance with other participants in the same thread, in contrast to some unnamed others—perhaps the working-class speakers referred to in the Wikipedia article. Because of such actions, I have often preferred not to talk about *ideology* but, instead, *ideological work*. Ideological constructs are not static, not things like rocks that hit you on the head, or dark clouds forever hanging over you, but instead, are formulations that start from assumptions, engage semiotic processes, and mobilize social projects (see Gal and Irvine 2019). They are part of a changing world, and though they may persist over a long time—or parts of them may—they may also evolve and shift.

Now, what might be meant by "semiotic processes" on which such formulations might be based? Let me pick up on another bit of the Reddit thread:

> — I do notice if a Marylander does go up north like NY or MA people will pick up on the "southness" in your speech no matter how slight.
>
> — Same here, there's a bit of South here and there, but most of the comments are when I'm **talking about technology**. Anybody who came in from out of state tells me I pronounce it *Dee ness* and *Gewgle*."

What might it be about "talking about technology" that, reportedly, triggers outsiders' comments about "Southness" in speech? The outsiders seem to assume that there's a contradiction between sounding Southern and being techno-savvy. I am led to that idea partly from my own experience when I was 17 and went "up north" from Maryland to an elite university in Massachusetts. Most of my new acquaintances there came from New York or Massachusetts and—just as the Reddit author notes—they commented that I sounded "southern" to them; and they seemed to think that was funny. To me, in my teenage anxiety to do well in a demanding intellectual environment, I thought that meant they thought I was stupid. (If you think I was wrong, recall the thread author who wrote, about [faar], "Beats me why it's so hard to say a 4-letter word.") So I tried changing my speech—and I did. What I thought I was doing was speeding it up, especially the vowels. The connections I was drawing for why "southern" speech might sound stupid came from a two-step process of ideological reasoning:

(1) Southern speech = slow speech (while northern speech, from New York or Massachusetts = normal or fast speech); and:
(2) Slow speech implies slow mind.

Whether my speech at the time, or any other Maryland speech, was actually slower than the average rate in New England is uncertain. I have no evidence on the matter outside my own recollected guesswork. Nevertheless, whether they can be independently documented or not, these ideas about speed of talk and of behavior in general are commonly found; think of the expression, "in a New York minute," metaphorically faster than a minute elsewhere. So this first step is an initial ideological move. Notice then that the second step, in which the quality of slowness is

(supposedly) shared by speech and mental processes, relies on the Peircean notion of iconicity. The slow speed is an auditory image—an auditory icon—taken as depicting mental processing. In our first coauthored publications Gal and I called this kind of ideologized semiotic process *iconization*, as if an index (slow speech as pointer to southern origin) becomes an icon (of mental process). Later, we realized that it is important that the sign is taken to be an icon, rather than that it is one; so we drew on a different part of Peirce's scheme, and called this process *rhematization*. A rheme is a sign that is conjectured to be an icon, regardless of whether there's some concrete rationale for so identifying it.[10]

What does this have to do with the Reddit author's post about technology talk? To many Americans, I believe, skillful techno-talk means being smart and quick-minded; it also means being on the fast track and being modern. On that note, the many thread authors who, when harping on southernness, refer back to the American Civil War and even earlier—as in, "these families have been here forever, some from the 1600s"—seem to invoke a chronotope of the old South, of tradition. Accordingly, this familiar chronotope provides another reason southern speech might seem not modern, not part of the world of techno-talk.

Let us go back now to the thread with the quick move from "southern accents" to whether "grits" are sold in grocery stores [three authors are represented in this excerpt]:

> — [After discussion of Maryland "southern accents":] As for Maryland being a Southern state. It is and it isn't. But I figure any place where you can regularly find grits in the grocery store has to be at least a bit Southern. But don't call me a Southerner. And don't call me a Yankee either…
>
> — …Can I call you Federal Territory?
>
> — …You can find grits in the grocery stores in New Jersey. Nobody buys them, though. They might be the original grits that came with the store.

What we see here is an example of how speech forms that index a place, and a kind of speaker associated with the place, regularly go along with other kinds of distinctions, such as among foods (as with grits, in this case), but potentially also among such things as types of clothing, hairstyles, houses, and so on. So just as Maryland ("southern" speech) goes with grits-in-stores—food that people buy because they do eat that—New Jersey speech would go with some other kind of food, not named here. The linguistic contrast between speech forms is bundled together with other contrasts, all indexing the region and its inhabitants. Gal and I have referred to this complex system as revolving around an *axis of differentiation,* where bundles of features contrast with other bundles according to a single principle of contrast (here, Southernness vs. Northernness, or Yankeeness). Notice that the bundled contrasts likely include aspects of economic and material life that are vulnerable to historical change, such as (in this case) the farming and fishing practices in which Maryland historically contrasted with northern regions.[11] The bundle as a whole does not stand still.

Another property of an axis of differentiation is that it allows the bundles it organizes to jump scales. The South/North axis manifested in the thread entries' discussion of differences can pertain to the broad regions divided by the Mason-Dixon line (which runs along the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania) and distinguishing, at the beginning of the Civil War, slave states from "free" states. That is doubtless the main frame of reference. But South/North can also pertain to narrower categorizations, such as regions within Maryland. The southern counties, identified by one of the thread authors as "south of Route 50 and Eastern Shore"—are taken to be more consistently "southern" in speech and other features, compared to northern counties and the area close to Washington DC. As it happens, the southern

counties are also the area that was formerly devoted, like much of Virginia, to tobacco cultivation. (This is just a small illustration of an ideological process we have called *fractal recursivity* —by which the same principle of contrast can apply to categorizations at different degrees of encompassment.)

Suppose now that we look again at the Wikipedia excerpt. As I mentioned earlier, it is evident that the Wikipedia entry has a different kind of authorship: this is an academic view, as opposed to a "folk" view. So even though none of these texts or thread entries have identifiable authors, the authorial stances are clearly distinct. Internally, too, these texts attend to different kinds of contrasts. There's nothing about the American South in the Wikipedia text, and almost nothing about race in the "folk" threads. We need to look at absences, at what people do not talk about, for their role in ideological work, as well as what people do talk about. Are the authors in the "folk" threads constructing a social world in which there are no Black people? Maybe; or maybe they just do not see Black speech as indexing locality in the same way (but why not?). In the Wikipedia entry, notice that the references to the working class ("white working-class families," "white blue-collar Baltimoreans") imply that there are other classes, but the entry does not mention them. What about middle- and upper-class speakers? Why are they absent? I suspect the Wikipedia authors do not see them as really "local"—perhaps assuming that these populations are more mobile, even cosmopolitan, thus not to be identified with "Baltimore" or "Maryland." So, this omission is a bit of ideological work too. Perhaps it is similar to that standard-educated stance, distanced from the working class, that I suggested the folk authors were taking. Yet, there's an upper class in Maryland, "high society" families who have lived there for many generations—as long or even longer than the blue-collar residents of Baltimore City. A social register, called the "Blue Book," lists these society families. I have never seen it, but I have been told that it only lists families that have been living there since before the Civil War, thus before 1861.

What lessons can we draw from this excursion? There are several. First, that academic sociolinguists and other "experts" and researchers are not exempt from ideologies of language. We all do ideological work. Everybody draws on presumptions about the world that fit with their own projects. Second, that there are methodological pointers too. To see the ideological work that people do in talk, one should pay attention to the contrasts they draw, and notice not only what they say but what they leave out -- what people do not mention, especially if somebody else does. You need to compare points of view. Third, although I have worked mainly with written material for the purposes of this paper, for the larger argument it is not essential to deal with written texts. The approach to ideology I have been illustrating here is not the kind that focuses on policy, position papers, and other written texts, produced in big institutions, political movements, or grand "isms," like capitalism, socialism, and so on. You can analyze those texts, and people have done so. But what I have been pointing to today is the ideological work in and about language in everyday life. That is something it is up to us, as linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists, to study. One might want to call some of the everyday examples "metapragmatics," but there is not some clear line between metapragmatics and ideology. Anything metapragmatic can be swept up in ideologies, or reveals them if pushed far enough; it is ideology all the way down.

Regarding method, moreover, I have illustrated, in a small way, a research strategy that does not draw boundaries around a research object (such as "Maryland speech"), even if that object is the main concern. The reason is that boundaries and differences and the relations of contrast across boundaries—differences in viewpoints, contrasts between sets of people and places—are exactly things you want to know about. Instead, I took a very small bit of data from one morning's Google search and used it as a centerpiece from which to branch out. If I were interested in Maryland language ideologies in their own right, I would trace many of these branches, investigating thread authors, and pursuing observation and interviewing in real life, which could then be examined for many things, including contrasts

between in-person talk and what people write about language in internet threads, and who does that internet posting. If I had no experience of the region I might need to start with some initial ethnographic orientation, but the main research would be from a centerpiece outward, following the connections drawn or implied in the data as I went along, treating boundaries and differences as a focus for investigation rather than its stopping points.

Because these connections would include contrasts among non-linguistic features (like the south/north contrast in food preferences illustrated in the present case), this methodological point brings us back to the question—raised earlier in this paper—of how ideologies of language take part in broader ideologies of semiosis. Bounding off language from a material world not only limits how you analyze the phenomena you are calling "linguistic," but also how you are analyzing the semiotics of other phenomena—as if they were isolated from talk about them or surrounding them. "Semiotics" must not seem to be about everything *but* language.

It is helpful, instead, as I have suggested, to start with a centerpiece that is simply an object of joint attention, and explore the semiotic activity that surrounds it, both talk and other action. I prefer to start with something linguistic, as I have done in this paper (with my simple question posed as a Google search), and work from there, but other kinds of semiosis are present and ready to be considered from the outset. Talk, while depending on conventions of linguistic form, is also a physical activity of the body. It is accompanied by gestures, positionings, air currents, and sound that reaches near or far; and it can be represented in other material forms, such as the writing conveyed in internet sites.

While I hope to have shown how one can discover differences in point of view, and an ideological axis of differentiation that bundles linguistic contrasts together with foods and other things, the strategy does not depend on starting from a linguistic object. In one chapter in our book Susan Gal and I illustrate an analytical strategy that starts from an object of attention having nothing ostensibly to do with language. It is an office door in which there is a pane of glass. But when we pursued the semiotic activity surrounding it—observing what people did with these doors, and how they talked about them; what stories they told about the doors, alleging why the pane of glass was there and why different people responded to the doors in different ways—we found that major ideological themes regarding discursive practices, social divisions, social positionings, and inequalities came to light.

The early formulations with which I began this paper defined "linguistic ideology" (or "language ideology") as a topic and domain for research. And it is still an important research topic. Yet, in the intervening years we have moved some distance from Silverstein's 1979 definition, although he too took important steps along the way, especially in the 1998 commentary I referred to earlier.[12] I have devoted a lot of my discussion to the coauthored work I have done with Susan Gal, but there have been many other significant works as well, both theoretically oriented writings and case studies, by a growing list of authors.[13] While I have not reviewed them all here, many of those works point in similar directions; it has been a conversation among many participants. Perhaps one of its most important moves—even for the study of language ideology—is actually a shift of focus *away* from "ideologies" (linguistic or semiotic) as objects, as wholes, as things to identify and describe. We move, instead, to the ideological work that is discoverable in semiotic activity and in the social projects those activities pursue. This shift opens a very broad avenue, both analytically and methodologically, for our future research.

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Notes

1. A chapter in my recent book coauthored with Susan Gal (Gal & Irvine 2019) includes an extended discussion relating to Baltimore. I have not drawn on that discussion directly in the present paper, however.

2. Accessed April 4, 2021.

3. At the time, I did not have any sense that I was defining something, only that I was working with an idea that was already in the air, perhaps to modify it or bring it more to bear on the matters of political economy that were my essay's theme. I was surprised to see my statement cited later as a definition.

4. For example: (Blommaert 1999; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Verschueren 1999).

5. The implicature here concerns the maxim of Relation, or relevance: "the speaker implicates that which he must be assumed to believe in order to preserve the assumption that he is observing the maxim of relation" (Grice 1975, 51). The contents of grocery stores must be assumed to be believed relevant to – connected to – the "southernness" of a state, which in turn is relevant to the "accents" of its speakers. Our thread poster implicates these connections. (The internet thread quoted here and in a later page of this article comes from the Hatrack River Forum, in postings from November 7-8, 2005, accessed April 4, 2021.)

6. "Grits," if you do not know the word, is a dish made from corn meal and popular in the southern US.

7. Our use of a Peircean approach in that paper and our later work was meant to take advantage of aspects of his thinking without following it slavishly. Peirce's project and ours were not the same. As Richard Parmentier once pointed out to me, one should treat Peirce's framework like a building's scaffolding: it helps in constructing your building, and then you remove it (personal communication). Although we did not remove the framework, the point remains that you draw on it only insofar as it's useful.

8. See Gal and Irvine 2019 for extended discussion of many of the points in the rest of this article.

9. This example comes from a Quorum thread, one of the other links accessed in my Google search of April 4, 2021. The author self-identifies as someone who has lived in Maryland for more than twenty years but, it is implied, came from somewhere else. To some extent, then, the author's opinion represents an outsider stance. The differentiation of outsider-origin residents from insider-origin residents is something that could be pursued in further research. Yet, the distanced stance of educated insider thread authors has important relationships to the outsider point of view.

10. We are drawing on Peirce's third trichotomy, which concerns what the interpretant takes the sign-relation to be. An advantage of the third trichotomy, for us, is that it allows the possibility that the interpretant might be mistaken.

11. One of the major changes was the decline of tobacco farming, historically as important an agricultural crop in Maryland as it was in Virginia. During the 20th century, agricultural land in Maryland was gradually lost to industry and housing developments, but some tobacco farming still existed in the southern parts of the state for most of the century. In 1998, recognizing that smoking is unhealthy, the state instituted a buyout program to compensate tobacco farmers for their loss of tobacco income. The large majority of farmers shifted to other crops. By 2000, Maryland's economy no longer featured this "southern" crop.

12. Also in later work such as Silverstein 2003, although in his later writings he tended not to make "linguistic ideology" the focus of his discussion but, instead, to allude to it as a factor in something else.

13. A more complete review of the path this research has taken would discuss such important works, some of them by authors already mentioned, some by other people. Besides additional works by Gal and myself, singly or jointly, and other works already cited, it would include such theoretical discussions and collections as in Blommaert 1999, Kroskrity 2004, Bauman and Briggs 2003, Carr and Lempert (eds.) 2016, Cavanaugh and Shankar (eds.) 2017, Joseph and Taylor (eds.) 1990, McIntosh 2005, J. Milroy 2001, Milroy and Milroy 2012, Ball 2014, Johnson & Milani (eds.) 2010, Woolard 2020. It would also include important regionally

focused works and collections such as Kroskrity and Field 2009, Kroskrity and Meek 2017, Lippi-Green 1997, Makihara and Schieffelin 2007, Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith 2004, as well as theoretically-illuminating case studies such as Woolard 2016, Das 2016, Kuipers 1998, Richland 2008, Rosa 2019. There are more; I omit other relevant works only for lack of space and time, not lack of significance.

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