

Discourse, ideology and identity: construction, social-cognitive grounding and hard facts

Peter Harder

The role of language in social processes has been the focus of intense interest across the fields that straddle the humanities and the social sciences. Much of this interest has been driven by a critical agenda associated with ‘critical theory’ in general, including poststructural theory with Foucault as a centrepiece and admixtures from Bourdieu. The sprawling field of discourse analysis has perhaps been the chief arena for exploration of language in relation to the three keywords in the title (*discourse*, *ideology* and *identity*), with links to thematic fields like postcolonial theory and gender studies.

My point of departure is the trajectory whereby cognitive linguistics has broadened to include social processes of meaning construction (cf. Harder 2010), raising the issues from the point of view of linguistic and mental entities and inquiring into their social anchoring. I have focussed on the role of conceptualizations of the nation as a topic that can elucidate some aspects of the key issues that have been under-discussed in the dominant climate. A central motif will be the issue of grounding of especially discourse, but by implication also of ideology and identity viewed as discursive constructions. This is intended as a corrective to the poststructural focus on detachment and reification, cf. Foucault’s definition of discourses as "the practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak", in favour of a perspective that includes the background from which discursive practices emerge. In the context of cognitive linguistics, the issue is related to the question of the extent to which framing can in itself reshape political issues, cf. Lakoff (e.g., 2008).

Very roughly speaking, a core conceptual model has been one in which discourses impose ideologies in which identities masquerading as ‘natural’ have a central place – reflecting a theoretical understanding in which signifiers are floating, ideologies are deconstructible and identities are hybrid. In the talk I argue that there could be significant civic as well as theoretical gains in a figure-ground reversal whereby interest is focussed on the interplay between discursive constructs and their social-cognitive grounding, rather than on their partial autonomy. As part of the study of this interplay, I discuss the relationship between individual-level facts (like construal and embodiment) and community-level facts (like hegemony and marginalization), based on the conceptual framework of evolutionary niche construction. My illustration case will be *Danish* and *British* understood as categories of national affiliation and identity.

References

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