

Cognitive Grammar Tackles Language as Ideology

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Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2003) and critical linguistics (Kress & Hodge 1979) have long been involved in untangling and expounding the often complex and mystified relationship between language and ideology. More recently this relationship has fallen into the purview of cognitive linguistics. It seems that we are currently in the midst of a debate concerning the range of applicability of cognitive linguistics to research aimed at unmasking the ideological in language structure and language use. There have been some successful attempts to apply the insights of cognitive linguistics to shed light on the social functioning of concepts and ideas (Dirven et al. 2001a, 2001b; Lakoff 1996). George Lakoff himself talks about “a cognitive sociolinguistics in existence” (Oliveira 2001: 43) as exemplified by several publications, among them his *Moral Politics* (Lakoff 1996). The vast majority of such cognitive linguistics research devoted to the social and linguistic functioning of ideology draws on metaphor theory (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980) and is basically concerned with explaining the role of the (complex systems of) conceptual metaphors with which we operate in the creation and maintenance of ideology and therefore of social relations of power. However, it seems that the role of other areas of cognitive linguistics, and notably of cognitive grammar, in such socially- and ideologically-oriented research has not received enough attention.

In view of the above in this paper I begin to explore the ways in which the insights of cognitive grammar, a branch of cognitive linguistics developed primarily by Ronald Langacker (cf. Langacker 1987, 1991, 1999) and refined and used in linguistic research of various sorts by multiple scholars (e.g. Turewicz 2001, Nessel 2001, Lipovsek 2004), could be profitably applied to work concerned with the language-ideology interface. I do so by first turning to the methods of language analysis employed by critical linguistics (whose view of the relation between language and ideology is shared by some cognitive linguists (e.g. Hawkins 2001)) as illustrated by one of the critical linguistics “manifestos” by Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge (1979). These authors’ theoretical background and language analysis methods, which draw heavily on Chomsky’s transformations, together with the ideology-oriented research results that they yield, are critically

evaluated and the advantages of applying cognitive grammar to such research are presented. In particular, critical linguistics' controversial finding that the use of the so-called possessive constructions in everyday, seemingly innocuous discourse, is symptomatic of the presence of Marx's fetishism of commodities in the English-speaking collective psyche (Kress & Hodge 1979: 118–119) is critically considered. Subsequently, a fairly detailed cognitive grammar account of English possessives (*have* and *-s*; *of* is also discussed but is claimed not to be a possessive proper) in which I support Turewicz's (2000: 146) claim that they designate a bi-directional relationship of relevance is used to account for the ubiquity of these elements in everyday usage. Finally, I attempt to demonstrate how the cognitive grammar analyses of English possessives can be successfully applied to pinpoint the ideological force and potential of (at least some) texts. This is done by focusing on two parts of an example text, an Internet blog in which the author portrays himself and defends his country – the US – against external/leftist criticism.

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