

studies in language & capitalism

The Janus-Face of Language: Reification in the Work of Habermas and the Bakhtin Circle

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Abstract

The distinction between reified and non-reified forms of communication animates both Habermas' and the Bakhtin Circle's projects. Habermas situates reaching understanding as a diagnostic of reification, while Bakhtin's counter-claim places hybridization as a diagnostic of reification and as a model of linguistic change. The violation of Kantian moral law: the treating of individuals as means and not as ends in themselves, is the crux of Habermas' reformulation of reification inasmuch as it also lays the ground for his reconstructive efforts in formal pragmatics. This effort establishes the ground from which a theory of meaning linking language-use and validity may be elaborated as part of a broader project in discourse ethics. So oriented this formal pragmatic theory of speech acts eschews semiotics in favour of semantics and the sentence as its point of departure. While the Bakhtin Circle's empirical pragmatic project takes this form of abstraction as the target of its polemic, the limits of Habermas' reconstruction can be seen in light of its identity thinking (to borrow from Adorno) and a theory of meaning that remains closed off to its foundations in exchange relations. In this context my primary purpose is to argue that if Habermas' semantic formulations bolster his claims on behalf of reaching understanding, they also remain mired in reifications that are exposed by semiotic projects in Bakhtin and Volosinov.

Populism and the Romanian 'Orange Revolution': a discourse-analytical perspective on the presidential election of December 2004

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Abstract

This paper analyzes differences in the legitimation strategies used by, and on behalf of the two presidential candidates in the elections of December 2004 in Romania, using a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis and pragma-dialectics. These differences are seen to lie primarily in the varieties of populist discourse that were drawn upon in the construction of legitimizing arguments for both candidates: a paternalist type vs. a radical-authoritarian, anti-political type of populism. I relate the success of the latter type to more effective strategic manoeuvring in argumentation, part of more

effective branding strategies in general, but also to existing types of political culture amongst the electorate and to social, economic circumstances. I also argue that, in the Romanian context at the end of 2004, a variety of otherwise fallacious populist electoral messages were perceived as reasonable and acceptable, as fitting adjustments to the situation and as means of optimizing the deliberative situation of the electorate.

Bill Clinton on the Middle East: Perspective in Media Interviews

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Abstract

A corpus of four TV and two radio interviews given by Bill Clinton after the publication of his memoirs 'My life' in June 2004 is examined for expressions of perspective on the Middle East. Bill Clinton's personal perspective is clearly reflected in his choice of referencing terms for parties in the Middle East conflict: The Israeli and Palestinian points of view are designated by first-personal and third-personal pronominals, respectively. A similar relationship is to be found for his references to the U.S.A. and Iraq. His perspective is manifested in his references to countries, people, and individual political leaders. Such references thus become expressions of a more general frame of understanding of power relationships in discourse, in which a progressive, advanced world is compared with a primitive, violent world. Implications for a theory of personal perspective in discourse and the dialogic nature of perspective are discussed.

The Nouveau Reach: Ideologies of Class and Consumerism in Reality-Based Television

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Abstract

*This essay presents a critical analysis of the class and consumptive ideologies on reality-based television programs *The Apprentice*, *The Bachelor*, *While You Were Out*, and *Pimp My Ride*. In the United States and the United Kingdom, consumption of material goods has risen markedly and the class gap has increased. This essay describes the prevalence of lavish commodities and commodity fetishism that normalise an upper class lifestyle and the prevalence of the myth of the American dream*

and meritocracy that obscure class barriers. I conclude that the sum of these capitalist ideologies encourages viewers to spend beyond their means, potentially resulting in wider class divisions.

The Ideological Construction of the Juggernaut of English: A critical analysis of American prestige press coverage of the globalisation of language

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Abstract

A given hegemonic order (re)produces itself in part by appeals to its apparent inevitability. This paper critically examines instances of precisely these sorts of appeals vis-a-vis the global hegemony of English. A condensed chapter from a recently completed dissertation, this paper critically examines selected texts taken from a pool of 275 accounts of the global rise of English published from Jan. 1, 1991 to May 1, 2003 in five American-owned prestige press publications. It focuses in particular on examples of the discursive construction of English as an unstoppable global juggernaut. It aims to draw attention to the valorization of English hegemony and to bring to critical light some of the paradoxical and often darker aspects of this global social phenomenon. The paper also aims to contribute to critical theoretical thought more generally. Change, linguistic and otherwise, is inevitable. However, the specific form it assumes is not inevitable. Thus, it is contended that the global rise of English must be critically identified as a particular, socially produced, and not-at-all 'natural' change.

Commentary

A Resolutely Uncivilized Colonial Bumps into Postcolonialism

Dr. Kanchhedia Chamaar

The Pocket Idiot's Guide to War-Profiteering in Iraq

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