

“Six Impossible Things before Breakfast”: Consistency and Contradiction in Language Ideology¹

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Some of you will recognize the source of my title: it comes from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*. Alice has encountered the White Queen, who tells Alice she is a hundred and one years old, five months and a day.

“I can’t believe *that!*” said Alice. . . . “One can’t believe impossible things.”

“I dare say you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Alice and the Queen are not discussing impossible beliefs about language itself, although the Queen’s utterances might illustrate impossible reasoning. But there’s actually a more local, and linguistic, background to the title. Many years ago, when I was visiting the Australian National University, a friend there told me another American was about to arrive for a conference. That young man – now a distinguished faculty member in UT Linguistics – was a truly dedicated linguist: “Every day,” said my friend, “he reads six grammars before breakfast.” Notice my friend’s equation of descriptive grammars with “impossible things” – certainly a bit of language ideology, subtly expressed.

My focus today is on problems of consistency and disjuncture in ideologies of language and in the experiences those ideologies interpret (and, in part, produce). The question is: where should we – “we” as experiencers, or “we” as analysts of ideologies of language – expect to see consistency and coherence? What if we find disjunctures and contradictions, instead? That needn’t be a terrible thing! Consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds, as Emerson said; contradictions are not always barriers to thought and action. On the contrary, disjunctures among ideas, or between ideas and the world, can be productive of new ideas and creative action. What happens, then, when ideologized

¹ This paper relies on extended conversations I’ve had over the years with Susan Gal, who should be understood as shadow co-author – at least, of any good parts of the paper.

visions of language – that is, visions of language in general, or of particular languages or bits of discourse, their speakers, and their appropriate occasions of use and practice, collide? And if there turns out to be a lack of fit between some ideologized vision of the (linguistic) world and some practical encounter with that world, what ideological, cultural, or political work is needed, and by whom, to suture the gap? Are there gaps and collisions that no linguistic body shop can repair, no matter what its skills?

I focus on these questions because they are entailed by the very concept of ideology, linguistic or otherwise. To speak of “ideology” at all is to imply that there is a disjuncture somewhere between it – whatever one is calling ideology or ideologized – and some other aspect of the world we live in. Inherent in the concept of ideology as Susan Gal and I use it is *difference of perspective*: the term “ideology” always entails the possibility of some alternative vision of the world. It is in this sense distinct from notions such as “scientific knowledge,” which implies certainty and truth, as if there were only one good match between ideas and the world.² (Herein lies the conception of ideology as false consciousness, a conception we do not share, although it is common in vernacular usage as well as among some theorists. If you are *absolutely* certain that your cat is a robot from Mars and you encounter someone who claims it is really an imp in the service of Satan, you will probably consider that person’s claim as simply false. A sense of absolute truth, of a single vision or a “view from nowhere,” does not admit differences of perspective.)

A first question about ideology, then, might ask how people’s mental models and evaluative schemes fit their experiences of an empirical world, and what some alternative models might be. Next, if you ask what people claim they do and you call their claim “ideology,” you are raising questions about how the claim matches the practice, and implying that some alternative assertion might match the practice as well or better. If you call the *practice* “ideologized,” you suggest that it rests on or embeds in it ideas that are “ideological” in the sense already mentioned. And if your concept of ideology is linked, like mine, to the relativities of power and social position, it follows that the experiences, and the perspectives, of people occupying different social positions must also differ. Either their understandings of their experiences are at odds, or some person(s)’ interpretation does not fit the facts as others see them.

What might “consistency,” “coherence,” and “contradiction” mean in this context? In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972:149-56) begins a discussion of “contradictions” by pointing out that there are different sorts of “coherences” one might be looking for. For example, he contrasts the systematicity of logic with a coherence of affect and desire, and the continuity of individual biography with the ideas a collectivity might hold in common. The type of systematicity being sought – or as I might put it, the direction of one’s analytical lens – governs what phenomena come into play as contradictions, and whether they can be resolved or, instead, reflect more fundamental, irresolvable tensions. Those deeper contradictions, Foucault argues, set into motion the discourses of knowledge, and the cultural, intellectual, and social activities that endlessly chase after a resolution that remains unreachable – unreachable unless and until the

² Like “knowledge,” another concept that might be compared with ideology is “culture.” Although its uses have been much debated, “culture’s” baggage differs from that of “ideology” precisely in the implication of wholeness and proper fit with its particular corner of the world. Nobody is likely to call ideology “adaptation,” which implies harmony with a material world, or a “seamless web.”

framework itself becomes transformed: “Contradiction,” he writes, “... functions throughout discourse, as the principle of its historicity.” (1972:151).³

In a similar spirit, I suggest that there are different kinds of potential coherences – hence, arenas of contradiction and disjuncture – that occupy sites of language ideology. In a sense, a site of ideology *is* such an arena. I will discuss six angles on this problem – six directions in which one might look for coherences and often enough find disjunctures, or discrepancies, instead. When that happens, something is set in motion, in consequence of the discrepancy. Perhaps the result is ideological work to ignore, erase, or deny the problem, so as to carry on business as usual. In that case, “discrepancy” is not experienced as contradiction, if it is even noticed at all. Or perhaps a space of conflict opens up. Perhaps the discrepancy leads to change, in ideology and/or in language and social (and sociolinguistic) relations. *The consequences for conceptual models and action that result from “dealing with” discrepancy actually cover a good deal of what scholars of language in society and culture have noted in patterns of attention, action, practice, and belief.*

Notice that an inconsistency between one’s ideas and the world, or between person A’s interpretation and person B’s, might not actually be observed or felt at all. Returning to the case of your cat, its behavior might easily fit both interpretations – so, only if your interlocutor happens to confide how worried he is about Satan’s representatives on earth might it emerge that he does not view your cat as you do. It is possible for people to interact for quite some time without realizing they have very discrepant interpretations of what is going on. Many a bedroom farce rests on such discrepancies. Characters converse on the basis of quite different understandings of the scene; only the audience recognizes the incongruity. (Just about any episode of *Fawlty Towers*, for instance, will offer lots of examples. The unrecognized discrepancies move the plot along, up to some final confrontation.) Erving Goffman (1974:484) called these discrepancies “frame problems.”

Here is an entertaining example we found online recently (Carter 2006):

(1) *Some here might not understand that we were fighting for state’s RATS!*

True story: for anyone who has seen the film *Gettysburg*, you’ll recall the scene where the Union Col. Joshua Chamberlain talks to a few Confederate prisoners from Tennessee. He clearly respects their courage but wants to know what makes them fight.

“We’re fightin’ for our RATS!” one Tennessean says.

“Your *rats*?” a puzzled Chamberlain asks.

“We’re fightin’ for our RATS!” the Tennessean repeats.

³ “Contradiction” is a complicated analytical concept, with its own baggage; see Tsitsipis (1995:572-573) for a thoughtful commentary. Drawing in part on a Marxist framework, Tsitsipis distinguishes “contradiction” from “opposition”: “contradiction” pertains to a conceptual realm (as in, a logical contradiction, i.e. among ideas) and not to material reality as such. He points out, however, that insofar as ideology – his paper’s topic – is embedded in lived relations and practice, it partakes of both the conceptual and the material realms.

Now, Ron Maxwell, who co-wrote and directed *Gettysburg*, grew up in a French-speaking household, seeing as his mother was French. When given an opportunity to see his film dubbed into French, he says he almost fell out of his seat during that scene. The French translator completely missed the joke and translated the line, “We’re fighting for our SQUIRRELS!”

In a more serious vein, John Gumperz and his students (Gumperz 1982, Gumperz [ed.] 1982) have documented many examples, especially in interethnic encounters, where people assume their interlocutors are being rude or unpleasant – never discovering that their impressions of one another derive from discrepant interpretations of their utterances.⁴ Each person may conclude that rudeness is part of the other person’s ethnic essence.

Moving beyond those cases of “frame problems,” and in keeping with my title, I’ll outline six angles on coherence/disjuncture that pertain to ideologies of language. This is neither an exhaustive list nor a typology. It’s just a convenient way of arranging some examples, and you will see that some of these “disjunctures” build upon or include others. In all of them, however, we can look at their consequences: what they set in motion; what kinds of efforts – practical, ideological, or analytical – might be undertaken to suture the gap, so that even if the result is social conflict, the discrepancies somehow become comprehensible. (But, in the end, this doesn’t mean all contradiction will go away.)

1. Semiotic relationships within a text or an interactional sequence.

Let us consider now – briefly -- the coherence of text, broadly construed. A great many linguists, philosophers, and others have discussed textual cohesion and textual interpretability. I don’t have a huge amount to add. I shall just glance at a few examples that may be most relevant to the rest of my discussion.

Recall first the fact that the interpretability of a text, transcript, or performance depends not only on its linguistic characteristics but on expectations about how utterances should follow from one another, and what should “normally” or “legitimately” occur in some genre of discursive practice. These expectations are tiny bits of ideology of language, although most analyses haven’t called them that – calling them instead, e.g., “contexts of understanding” (Schiffrin, 1984:262). Thus, example (2) looks a bit odd until you learn where it occurred: in a conversation about renting an apartment, where A is the potential renter discussing eligibility for the apartment, and B is the landlord (from Sacks, April 17, 1968, cited in Levinson, 1983:292):

- (2) A: I have a fourteen year old son
 B: Well that’s all right
 A: I also have a dog
 B: Oh I’m sorry

The examples in (3) come from Grice’s (1975) work on conversational postulates:

⁴ Writing on some similar issues, Deborah Tannen (1984:21) called such problems “pragmatic homonymy.” Her own examples often concern male-female conversations or conversations between Americans from different parts of the country. Thus the “machine-gun question,” such as a quick “Where?” latched onto one’s interlocutor’s utterance, suggests an aggressive challenge to some people, but a sign of enthusiastic engagement, to others. (Ibid.: pp. 64-71.)

- (3) a. [academic recommendation letter] A is writing a testimonial about a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job, and his letter reads as follows: “Dear Sir, Mr. X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.”
- b. [refusal of uptake] At a genteel tea party, A says *Mrs. X is an old bag*. There is a moment of appalled silence, and then B says *The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn’t it?*

How you interpret the text in (3a) depends on your assumptions about what a recommendation letter should “properly” include, as well as your assessment of whether the author of the letter held the same assumptions (hence letters from abroad are sometimes hard to interpret). The disjuncture in (3a) is not actually inside the text, but between token and type: the letter as token and the type of which you take it to be a token. Example (3b), also a “flouting” in Grice’s terms, similarly invites an interpretation that depends on mutual understandings of what “ought” to have occurred instead, at a “genteel” party, with “gentility” ideologically characterized by a saccharine kind of talk. In the examples in (4), the gap between the initial question and its ultimate answer will not be perceived as a disjuncture, as long as the intervening material can be interpreted as an “insertion sequence” (Levinson, 1983) – legitimately linked to the topic or activities at hand. Legitimacy is crucial here too – whence my considering these examples under the rubric of ideologies of language and linguistic practices.

(4) Insertion sequences (Merritt, 1976):

- a. A. May I have a bottle of Mich? ((Q1))
 B. Are you twenty-one? ((Q2))
 A. No. ((A1))
 B. No. ((A2))
- b. Customer: You have coffee to go?
 Server: Cream and sugar?
 Customer: Yes please.
 Server: That’ll be 50 cents.
 Customer: (pays 50 cents)

Let’s turn for a moment to consider coherences that depend on a broader notion of text, one that includes not just the segmentables of a linguistic text but also the other semiotic modalities that co-occur in its live performance, such as prosody, gesture, facial expression, dress, and so on. My next example derives from Erving Goffman’s ideas about “role distance” – not from his published essay of that title, but from his live demonstration in a class at Penn long ago. Picture, then, a graduate student who is late to class, arriving fifteen minutes after his seminar has begun. Creeping quietly into the room, he darts sheepish glances toward the professor. “Sorry,” he mouths. Through his apologetic words and glance, the student (as Goffman put it) “begs not to be judged in the way that appears likely, implying that his own standards are offended by his act and that therefore some part of him, at least, cannot be characterized by the unseemly action.” (Goffman, 1961:104). He casts a “split-off portion of himself” in a bad light. Part of his performance, the late entrance, is presented as the act of a part of himself that is disavowed by another part that comments upon it. The situation is a bit like that of a person who makes a statement in a sarcastic tone of voice. (“*So* good of you to join us, Mr. Jones,” says the professor.)

There are complexities here, concerning which part of Mr. Jones' performance might seem the more faithful representation of his character; no doubt, the professor's knowledge that Jones's late arrival is consistent with his usual arrival time spurs the sarcastic remark. Notice that what the professor is doing is taking one part of Jones's disjoint semiosis as more "true" and perhaps more intentional; and we, interpreting the Professor's sarcasm, contrast some of its semiotic ingredients as "referential" while the others we interpret as betraying "true intent" and affect.

Finally, consider the relationship between talk and clothing, such as what one wears to an academic job interview. Can you wear a tee-shirt? Your decision relies on what you understand the "job interview" and its conventions to be; and what understandings you believe your audience will have. The story is told of a candidate for a faculty position in anthropology who gave her job talk wearing brightly-striped knee-high socks, a short skirt, and bullet-filled bandaliers draped across her upper body. Is there a disjuncture here? Is the clothing at odds with the social occasion? Is it at odds with the candidate's verbal performance? If her talk is utterly academic and in that sense resembles your garden-variety job talk, is one of her performance modalities more predictive of her future performances than the other modalities are? Will a "discrepancy" cause her to be rejected, or will it alter everyone's expectations of what a dynamite job interview should be?

These brief examples, though residing only in interactional moments and brief performances, have illustrated potential gaps between ideologized expectations and the empirical experiences people try to interpret. What kind of talk should occur at a genteel gathering? How should an utterance relate to the preceding one? How should a job candidate present herself? And, what do the acts we observe instantiate?⁵ Our ways of interpreting discourse – including its consistency or lack thereof – are pervasively ideological, in respect to regimes of truth and legitimacy, and perceived inconsistencies have consequences.

2. Named languages and ideologically-linked social categories.

Let me move now to ideologies of language on a larger scale: a scale that identifies named languages with broad social categories. The literature on language ideologies has often pointed out, and decried, the widespread Herderian assumption of (monolingual) language as the mark and essence of nationality. (Or ethnicity; whence the notion of "ethnolinguistic groups.") What happens when this ideologized expectation about language and ethnicity or nationality conspicuously fails to match the experienced world?

Some years ago I had an Italian-American undergraduate student who wrote a course paper entitled, "Why can't I speak my own language?" Implicit in the title, and elaborated more explicitly in the paper, was the idea that ethnic distinctiveness is marked by linguistic distinctiveness, both of which he interpreted (in his own case) as "Italian." It

⁵ Note that any act of categorization – of grouping two or more things together on grounds of similarity – requires both selecting the "similarity" and also ignoring the differences between the two. Recall that Bauman and Briggs (1990) discuss this issue with regard to texts and the "intertextual gap." Comparing one text with another, such as a model exemplar of a genre, one might minimize the differences (and so consider the new text as just another token of the genre-type), or maximize them (so the new text represents a break from the past).

follows that a person of “Italian” ancestry can claim Italian language as his own, and his inability actually to speak it is a disjuncture – an anomaly that needs to be explained. Partially resolving the problem, the student’s paper argued that his family situation in the US had isolated his own generation from any Italian-speaking community, thus breaking the “natural” means of linguistic transmission. He was no less Italian, however, and therefore signed up for Italian language courses in college. His case will be familiar to college language instructors who encounter “heritage” learners as a high percentage of their course enrollments.

Though situated in a social world, the young man’s essay calls to mind the essentialisms people see in natural kinds, essentialisms they draw upon in finding an explanation for anomaly. People commonly reason, for example, that a seven-legged spider, if duly constituted of spider essence, must have suffered an accident, in life or in the egg, which deprived it of an eighth leg. Some external, contingent mechanism is thus found to account for a token’s failure to exhibit all expected characteristics of a type without losing the type’s supposed essence. Such reasoning resolves the problem of anomaly. For our Italian-American student, however, the problem was only partly resolved. The standard Italian taught in college language courses differed conspicuously from the speech of the student’s immigrant grandmother, and while he understood why this would be the case he remained troubled by it. More significant, perhaps, was the role of his father, who – like so many children of immigrants – had resisted the language of his own parents, and deliberately moved out of an ethnic neighborhood. For his son the student, some blame attached to this rejection of “Italianness” and to the father’s notion that one cannot be “Italian” and “American” at the same time. Yet, to the extent that the son actually favored a sort of bicultural, bilingual ideology of language, the fact that he could speak only English remained empirically problematic.

Some of the son’s behavior looks like a reaction to his father, but some of it is a consequence of historical changes in American ethnicity – the history and demographics of immigrant populations in the US, to be sure, but more importantly, the widespread cultural shift away from “melting pot” models of Americanness to “multicultural” models in recent decades. Everyone can now seek a special ethnic heritage; hyphenated identities are now inhabitable, perhaps even desirable, as long as the “-American” part dominates. (So perhaps the hyphenated’s command of the Other language should not be *too* native-like.) Both the son and the father, in their different ways, have felt obliged to tidy up their lives in order to match their ethnolinguistic presuppositions; it is those presuppositions that, in the wider American context, shifted during the twentieth century. In keeping with wider historical currents affecting their generations, son and father envision different cultural models – different ideal scenes of language and identity, from which their experience is discrepant, and toward which they must strive.

To what extent should we expect the empirical propositions that are presupposed by, or offered as supports for, an ideologized view of the world to be true, or at least not contradicting the viewer’s practical experience? As Eagleton (1991:14, 26) points out, ideology as embedded in lived experience cannot be wholly false. A worldview must incorporate *some* true propositions, since otherwise its holders would not be able to live in the world. Their implied beliefs must touch the ground somewhere, as must those propositions that undergird social roles and practices. Our student knows that his grandmother came to the US not speaking English, and he knows that the country she came from, “Italy,” where there are many residents who don’t speak English either, claims a literature written in what he is learning as “Italian” language. As his attempted resolution

of the anomaly shows, an ideologized worldview can tolerate some discrepancies in its propositions' relation to a "real world" without utterly threatening the ideology as a whole – although such discrepancies may open a space for contestation, such as a conflict between generations, as we see in this case. But whether contestation arises or not, discrepancies, once felt, have consequences. They lead either to efforts to make the world match the ideological model or to attempts to adjust the model itself so as not to belie experience.

For this particular Herderian ideology of language-as-Volk, one could cite many examples from officialdom, and from academia, of efforts to make the world match the model, or of simply ignoring the problem. The ideology is remarkably resilient – an interesting point in itself.

3. Assertions and actions.

Suppose we consider a person's explicit claims about what he or she believes or does (in some circumstance), and the same person's actual practices in that circumstance, as two sites of ideological analysis. To what extent should one expect them to be consistent? (That is, when you can talk the talk, does it follow that you walk the walk? No, according to the cliché.) For example: the sociolinguistic literature is full of cases in which bilingual or bidialectal people claim never to codeswitch or code-mix, but are recorded doing so only moments later. Similarly, there are many cases in social dialectology in which speakers have been recorded using, in casual speech, linguistic forms they themselves have strongly stigmatized in other situations. As Labov (1972:532) noted for New York City, "those who used the highest percentage of a stigmatized form [such as high values of (oh)] were the most sensitive in stigmatizing it in the speech of others." Labov continued (p. 533): "It has become clear that very few speakers realize that they use the stigmatized form themselves." These discrepancies are systematic, and they are not limited to New York or to the US. They are a major reason Labov developed a design for the sociolinguistic interview that aimed to distract speakers from self-monitoring.

To the extent that these discrepancies do reflect some lack of self-awareness on speakers' part, the specter of "false consciousness" again raises its ugly head. One must bear in mind, however, that the speakers' claims and practice – or, in Labov's New York City research, the evaluations of others in matched guise tests, versus the recordings of "vernacular" usage, situate a speaker in two different scenes of linguistic practice. The models the speaker draws upon can represent the social and linguistic world in different ways. They may concern different aspects of a person's life: different roles s/he plays, or different contexts in which s/he acts. A classic study that touched upon these questions of speakers' "consistency" is Blom and Gumperz's (1972) analysis of social dialectology in Hemnesberget, Norway – a study of the social distribution of regional and standard varieties. In Hemnesberget, speakers of various social backgrounds expressed a strong attachment to the "localness" of the regional dialect but in conversation on other topics, they shifted back and forth between regional and standard varieties. Blom and Gumperz argued (1972:421) that such shifts are to be expected: "... the same individual need not be absolutely consistent in all his actions. He may wish to appear as a member of the local team on some occasions, while identifying with middle-class values on others." From the speaker's perspective, this is not so much "inconsistency" as contextualization.

While their analysis situationally contextualized the use of local and standard varieties in complex ways, Blom and Gumperz also found that code-switching patterns varied

according to how deeply a speaker was enmeshed in local social networks or, instead, in national social networks. But what happens if a speaker is confronted with the discrepancy between these sites of linguistic practice?⁶ We are told (1972:430) that speakers reacted to a tape of codeswitching with disapproval, and some speakers “promised to refrain from switching during future discussion sessions” (but did not). The discrepancy here is between two models of social scenes, in which the Hemnesberget resident interacts with the outsider linguists. In one scene, the Hemnesberget speaker inhabits localness, in contrast to the outsiders (who came to the town to investigate local dialect usage); in the other scene, the Hemnesberget speaker exhibits his/her intellectual sophistication, education, and understanding of national issues, in common with the outsider academics. Notice that it was *the outsiders* who presented the possible discrepancies between these two practices to the Hemnesberget speakers. Most of the time in Hemnesberget social life these two scenes did not come into overt contrast with one another, so no special ideological work or tidying-up of lives needed to be done.

Recall, for a moment, the Italian-American boy and his father. That example and the Hemnesberget example actually have a great deal in common. In both cases there is a discrepancy between two model scenes: for the Italian-Americans, they are broad scenes of assimilation (Italians melting into an American community) versus multiculturalism (Italians retain their own sub-community, as other Americans do). The difference between the Italian-Americans and Hemnesberget lies in their historical settings. In the Italian case, the boy’s model has completely replaced his father’s model as an inhabitable possibility. For the denizens of Hemnesberget, on the other hand, as far as we know, both scenes are possible. If the linguists are not there, no one cares that the two scenes coexist. The situation is in stasis.

4. Biography, language, and presentation of self.

The Hemnesberget speakers who “promised to refrain from switching” (but did not) raise questions about language’s role in *biographical* consistency. To what extent is a person expected to maintain a consistent presentation of self, social persona, over time? How much time? And in whose eyes?

My first example concerns reported speech. How much can a speaker perform other people’s voices, yet retain a consistent social persona and personal biography? The transcript in (5) is taken from a work by Erica and Malcolm McClure (based on fieldwork conducted in 1968-70). It shows a multilingual woman who, in recounting a story, code-switches among three linguistic varieties: Saxon, standard German, and Romanian. She switches when she reports utterances attributable to different speakers. As the McClures explain, the narrator FT, a Saxon-speaking resident of Romania, was supposed to travel to West Germany. In the narrative, she reports her encounters with the Romanian passport office and travel bureau, where she was given information about visas that turned out to be incorrect, because when she reaches the Austrian border she is turned back for lack of an entry visa for Germany.

⁶ Sociolinguistic studies rarely give us much information on this point, since they have been more interested in documenting the discrepancy itself, and in developing techniques to evade speakers’ self-monitoring.

Narrator FT, as far as we know, is fluent in all three varieties.⁷ Although she switches among three languages, nothing about her usage compromises her own persona as a member of a Saxon-speaking community long resident in a region that has become part of Rumania. In the US, in contrast, this kind of multilingual fluency is often deemed inconsistent with a red-blooded American identity. As I mentioned earlier, American “multiculturalism” rarely translates into truly fluent multilingualism. Indeed, in the US there are ideological pressures against fluency in languages other than American English.

(5) Transcript of reported speech (McClure & McClure, 1988:36):

Utterance	Character, language	English translation
ən do vor əzi ə gaŋ məlitsyán ən zot ke mix ^y :	FT, narrative frame. Saxon	And there was a young policeman and he said to me:
“Aici e pașaporta, acumă poți să pleci în Germania.”	Policeman at Romanian passport office. Romanian	“Here is your passport, now you can leave for Germany.”
“Dar primă dată mă duc – trebuie să mă duc la București.”	FT Romanian	“But first I go – I need to go to Bucharest.”
“Ce aia? Nu trebuie să te duci!”	Policeman at Romanian passport office. Romanian	“What’s that? You don’t need to go!”
... [lines omitted]
An sprax ^y t day haran:	FT, narrative frame Saxon	And the woman says:
“Numai la ora unșpe puțeti veni după acte.”	Romanian travel agent Romanian	“Only at 11:00 can you come for your documents.”
... [lines omitted]
Zæt an də pos ən zæt ba mix ^y :	FT, narrative frame Saxon	Looks at the passport and says to me:
“Wohin reisen Sie?”	Border officer (Austrian) German	“Where are you traveling?”
“Nach Westdeutschland.”	FT German	“To West Germany.”
“Nirgends reisen Sie,”	Border officer German	“You are not going anywhere,”
Sprax ^y t ə,	FT Saxon	He says,
“Nirgends reisen Sie, Sie haben keine Einreise.”	Border officer German	“You are not going anywhere, you have no entry visa.”

In the US, as Jane Hill (e.g., Hill, 1993, 2001) points out in her work on “Mock Spanish,” Anglos’ rendering of Spanish words often alters them both phonologically and grammatically to an extent far beyond what could be explained by lack of Spanish linguistic competence. For an Anglo to conform to Spanish linguistic norms is problematic, at least in many quarters in US public life. Hill (1993b) has illustrated this point with reference to a sketch from the TV show *Saturday Night Live* from about 1990.

⁷ The McClures note (p. 32) that fluency in codes other than Vingard Saxon varied, according to particulars of a person’s residence, kinship networks, and degree of formal schooling. There is no information about the particular narrator FT’s competences, however, other than what appears in the transcript. I thank Katherine Verdery for suggesting that the form *pașaporta* in the second line, instead of *pașaportul*, might indicate non-native disfluency.

My take on the sketch departs from hers only in a few particulars, not in her general ideas about Anglo/Latino relations as revealed in linguistic practice.

In the skit, a group of apparently Anglo television newscasters, reporting (in English) news items about Nicaragua, begin using Spanish pronunciation for Latin American placenames. As the skit proceeds, they apply a Spanish pronunciation to more and more Spanish-origin names and words: place-names in the US (*San Francisco*), automobiles (*Camaro*), sports teams (*Broncos*), and items of Mexican food. Their phonetics become parodically hyper-hispanized as the skit goes on. Partway through the skit the Latino actor Jimmy Smits, playing a newsman named “Antonio Mendoza,” joins the group; unlike the other newscasters, he insists on anglicized pronunciations of names. The skit ends when “Antonio Mendoza” loses his temper at the Anglo newscasters: they have corrected his pronunciation of the words in his own food order (*enchilada*) to a hyperbolically Spanish phonetics. He reveals himself more American than the Anglo-Americans with whom he is compared, while those Anglo-Americans have the audacity to claim better Spanish language skills than an ethnic Latino. The Anglos’ use of Spanish phonetics is deemed inconsistent with an Anglo-American biography – therefore funny, under a prevailing ideology of language identifying authentic Americanness with monolingual American English. The Anglos’ hyper-Spanish isn’t “real” Spanish, anyway. Only the Latino can really lay claim to Spanish, although the skit, if I recall it correctly, offers no evidence of “Antonio Mendoza’s” actual Spanish linguistic competence.

These two examples, the Saxon-Romanian narrator and the *Saturday Night Live* skit, suggest that the perception of biographical consistency or inconsistency itself depends on the language ideology that dominates the gaze. Depending on the ideological regime, what is performed within the frame of reported speech might “leak” out of the frame onto the social persona of the reporter. In the skit, Spanish pronunciation cannot – within major public domains in the US – be framed in a way that protects an Anglo-American user from the implication of “contradiction.” The Anglo newscasters just sound ridiculous.

5. Social positions and perspectives.

My examples so far have focused mainly on ideas attributable to an individual subject, in comparison with the subject’s experience of, and practice in, a socially-constituted linguistic world. Obviously, though, individual subjects are not alone. Our consociates’ perspectives differ from ours just as their social positions and biographies do. In fact, for me, this social differentiation and relativity of perspectives is a major reason for exploring “ideology” in the first place. Unlike “culture,” a concept whose baggage includes presumptions of wholeness, sharedness, homogeneity, and stability (even though some authors have tried to detach the concept from this problematic luggage), “ideology” implies difference of perspectives, especially as related to social inequalities. “Ideology” implies an inevitable differentiation of views – of the direction and contents of one’s gaze – at the level of community and society.

Of course, the differences among gazes/sightings at any site of language ideology do not preclude overlapping ideas. In fact, the overlap may serve to highlight the areas of difference. For example, in Stalinist-era Russia, poets such as Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam composed poetry – recited orally, in private, to friends because they did not dare to write it down – that included political satire and critique. These poets and the secret police differed radically in their opinions of Stalin and the regime; yet, poets and police shared an assumption that poets were politically influential and that the poetic form,

in itself, did not protect a message from retribution. As Mandelstam commented, “Poetry is respected only in this country – people are killed for it.” (Kelly, 2005:64).⁸

Another example comes from my fieldwork, now decades ago, in a rural Wolof community in Senegal. Village society was divided into ranked categories called “castes” in the regional literature because of the nature of their social segregation. The high ranks were the *gээр*, or “nobles”; the various lower ranks included “slaves” and “artisans” of several types, one of which was the griots – artisans with words. Among the griots’ tasks was (and still is) to praise and flatter their noble patrons, and to make the noble’s greatness widely known. Sometimes griots praised their patrons in elaborate formal performances; sometimes they just shouted praises all over town. (When I revisited that village last summer, a griot took up a megaphone to announce my arrival and general greatness as he walked around town.) Griots were paid, often handsomely, for these acts of praise and for keeping the communicative flow going, filled with praise and not with calumny.

Everyone knew that griots could legitimately expect rewards for their efforts. Nevertheless, griots and nobles had different perspectives on the situation. Griots commenting on their role emphasized the importance of aesthetic criteria, professionalism, and social service. Nobles, on the other hand, complained to me about the difficulty of managing griot demands, and about feeling trapped if they encountered a griot in a public space and the griot launched into a loud praise-performance. Both griots and nobles told me how much they valued truth: the utterances in the praise-performance should be true statements about the object of praise. But griots claimed that (some) nobles cared more about being flattered than about the truth, while nobles claimed that (some) griots would say anything for money and would praise people who didn’t deserve it.

I never saw these differently-positioned views lead to open contestation. Nobles and griots were probably too dependent on one another for that. But these issues did seem to underlie a certain amount of competition within each group. So, for example, there were griots who were quite willing to disparage other griots along precisely the same lines as nobles tended to disparage the whole griot category; and the same was true among nobles. In short, the same regime of value concerning eulogistic talk, money, and truth, organized distinctions within a social category as organized distinctions between categories. We (Irvine & Gal, 2000) have called that kind of process fractal recursion.

An interesting question in these cases is not whether there are differences in perspective – there always are – but how they are expressed and what the consequences are. Difference may open a space for contestation, but that space may or may not be filled with overt debate or action. The contestation may be displaced into another theater.

6. Recursivities and shifting scales of analysis.

Suppose, now, that a principle important in some ideology of language is applied recursively, as I’ve just mentioned. Originating in or normally located in one kind of social relation, the principle is projected onto relations on a different social or linguistic scale. For the Wolof nobles and griots I’ve just discussed, a principle relating these broad social categories to each other was projected inward, operating on a narrower social scale

⁸ Mandelstam was arrested for a poem about Stalin describing his “cockroach whiskers” and “fat fingers, like worms,” even though the poem had not been written down. The oral channel did not protect the poet from a “friend’s” betrayal.

to produce a distinction within a category. But projections can go either inward or outward. A wider social scale encompasses more personnel and more activities; it is as if a camera lens were set to a wider field of vision, zooming out.

Now, if the positioned gaze – the eye before the camera, so to speak – does not change, then presumably the sightings are consistent. They gaze at more stuff in the world, but from the same position. If, however, we consider a differently positioned gaze, the new perspective might entail a shift of cultural models and, consequently, in relevant ideological principles. So, some contradiction might emerge when a gaze from a new perspective comes up against linguistic practices produced under the original gaze.

Returning to West Africa, consider the case of Salif Keita, an internationally popular musician from Mali who, as his surname indicates, belongs to one of Mali's highest-ranking Mande clans – rulers of the medieval empire of Mali (after which the modern country is named). Salif Keita's griotlike practices have included producing music for a huge public, in large arenas. He even performs historical texts and songs from the traditional repertoire, usually considered the griots' professional prerogative. These performances and their public setting do not support an interpretation of his activity as merely context-dependent. Indeed, early in his career Salif was sharply criticized, and ostracized, by his family and others in his local community for his musician activities, which were seen as contradicting the principles of behavior appropriate to his rank.

In 1968 Salif left home and moved to the capital city, Bamako, and later to Abidjan. In these more cosmopolitan locales he and his bands played for an internationale clientele. They used Western instruments and favored a musical style owing more to Cuba, Zaire, and France than to Mali itself. But as Salif Keita moved further from home, his lyrics increasingly drew on Malian griot traditions, including praise-singing and the historical songs associated with Sunjata Keita, 13th-century founder of the Empire of Mali and Salif Keita's own royal ancestor. Some of those songs from the Sunjata epic are traditionally performed by griot women as interludes to the narrative and instrumental music performed by griot men. From the perspective of his home community, therefore, Salif's actions were multiply transgressive: he was singing in public; he was performing the historical epic that is traditionally the griots' prerogative; he was singing women's songs – and he was singing the praises of his own family (thus, indirectly, praising himself).

All these Malian and international sources came together in Salif's own creative blend, described by World Music journalist Yamotei (1987) as “a powerful, seamless, and highly sensitive melting pot of influences, transplanting the traditional music of the griots into the present..” By the early 1980's Salif was touring and making recordings in North America and Europe. He moved to Paris, where (in 1987) he recorded an album, *Soro*, that was a huge international success. It was as a major African star on the World Music stage that, in 1997, Salif finally moved back to Mali. By then he had reconciled with his father.

Notice now the gazes from which Salif's performance does, or does not, appear anomalous. For the international audience there is nothing problematic about Salif's bringing a Malian griot tradition onto a world stage. On that stage, he represents Mande, or Mali, or even Africa, depending on the audience. In fact, for a European or American music audience Salif's status as “prince” may enhance his appeal because it is consonant with their often romanticized and archaized conception of Africa. The contradiction lies, instead, in the view of Salif Keita from within a local Mande world.

Some Malians have never become reconciled to Salif's behavior. Others, following on his international success (which put an end to predictions that his actions doomed him to terrible disaster because violating caste principles), found ways to account for the anomaly and preserve the basic ideological tenets: Salif is albino, therefore already anomalous. One contradiction resolves another. His physical appearance signals that he is the exceptional person to whom the normal rules of behavior do not always apply – like his medieval ancestor Sunjata Keita, who, according to some versions of the tradition, could transform himself magically into a lion. This account seems to be part of Salif's own story about himself, explaining his father's initial rejection as well as explaining his own urge to blend black and white. Moreover, by the mid 1990's Salif turned to a different source for his inspiration, away from the *jeliw* (the griots proper) to other guardians of tradition: the bards of the Mande *donso* "hunters' society," independent of caste divisions. According to the Malian scholar Karim Traoré (1999:184), Salif Keita's acceptance within Mali owes as much to this change of artistic sources as to his new wealth and international success.

Still, in pursuing his extraordinary musical talents professionally – and we note that the distribution of musical talents in the population does not precisely match ideological predictions – Salif Keita can also be seen as contesting the ideology that would have precluded this profession as impossible for a person of his rank and ancestry. And perhaps some aspects of that ideology of language and performance are changing, in contemporary Mali. In any case, within the local Mande world ideological work has needed to be done, whether it be (a) taking on the outsiders'/international perspective as one's own, and thus changing ideological parameters, changing what models or aspects of models are salient; (b) finding a way, within an indigenous ideology of language and performance, to account for the anomaly through the circumstance of albinism; (c) ignoring the problem, once Keita ceased to appropriate the particular texts belonging to the griots.

7. Residues?

As Pascal wrote (*Pensées* ¶ 260), *Le croire est si important! Cent contradictions seraient vraies.* ("Belief is so important! A hundred contradictions would be true.") True – perhaps, but only if some ideological or practical work can make them so, or make them seem to be so. The disjunctures I have outlined set such work in motion. But I do not want to leave you with the impression that gaps can always be sutured, and contradictions turned into coherence. Some contradictions can remain; and new ones can be produced, when circumstances change or when the work to fix the old ones ends up changing the rules of the game. My Italian-American student's grandmother spoke "Italian," because she came from Italy, but she didn't speak "Italian," because it wasn't what was taught in the student's Italian language class. A Senegalese friend living in Michigan rejects French as "the language of the colonial conquerors." He did not want to go to France; he says he's "had enough of the French" and does not like to speak their language. Yet, he admits that he speaks French with other Senegalese if they are "intellectuals" (and this I observe to be the case, whether the topic is cosmopolitan or not). French is rejected, but French is valued. Another Senegalese acquaintance of mine living in Michigan is working hard on improving his English, but the further he gets with English the more he seems to worry about "not sounding different" from when he left home. So he tape-records himself speaking Wolof and listens to the tapes every week, to see whether his Wolof has changed. He wants to speak differently, but he does not want to speak differently. No vision can entirely encompass the world. There will always be impossible things – sometimes as many as six kinds, which you can practice believing before breakfast.

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