Introduction

Statements about language are never only about language – and they are never only statements. This double insight is key to our book. Statements about language always reach beyond the immediate linguistic forms. They implicate knowledge about the rest of social life; they intersect with other communicative means; they give signals about their speakers; and, inevitably, they are social actions embedded in history. To comment on languages, or describe them, or recommend policy with respect to them, is to engage in a metadiscourse, a reflexive activity that is at once a practice and a commentary upon that practice, within a realm of alternative possibilities.

The second part of the insight is equally important. Statements about language are never merely statements. They entail ideological positions that are made evident in multiple sites of social life, often in contradictory and contested ways, and they have wide-ranging consequences in the material world. The communicative signs people use are engaged in social projects, motivating and sometimes transforming their activities – not only commenting upon them.

This book focuses on the ways conceptions of language and linguistic practices – indeed of communication more broadly – depend on *differentiations*: the differentiations among signs, among people's social positions and historical moments, and among the projects people undertake. The same might be said about understandings of social life, which depend in turn on communicative forms and the differentiations they reflect and effect. The questions about language, ideology, and difference that inspired this book have been abiding interests for both of us. How should we understand difference, in language and in social life? How are linguistic differences noticed and their social meaning constructed? How do discourses about difference – even if about mere contrast – naturalize hierarchy and domination? How do some differences become persuasive as the basis for action, while others are ignored? How are scholars involved? Our work, separately and together, has always sought to explore language and linguistic practices ethnographically; to attend to relations of power, politics, and history; and to seek fundamental insights into the nature of signs and sign-relations. In this book we aim to push these approaches further, by focusing on differentiation as ideologized vision – and semiotic process – in a field of linguistic and social possibilities.

In concert with other linguistic anthropologists and some scholars in other fields as well, we take it as fundamental that social action requires a semiotic basis. That is, it requires orientations to the world that rely on signs, which have multiple capacities to represent aspects of our social lives and experiences, not only by labeling them. Those orientations to the world are positioned – that is, they incorporate a point of view – and they are organized in metadiscourses and regimes of value. Such semiotic organizations are aptly called *ideologies* because they are locally and historically specific framings, suffused with the political and moral interests of the social positions and projects in which they are embedded. We will have more to say about our concept of ideology and how our use of this term relates to the enormous literature on it, in later pages. Suffice it to say, for now, that we consider ideologies to be neither true nor false. They are positioned and partial visions of the world. They work via sign relations that entail *comparison* and *perspective*. Ideologized visions link differences in expressive features – linguistic and otherwise – to cultural images, constructing stereotypes of people and activities, and rendering them convincing.

Our topic opens up in multiple directions. It leads us to a foundational discussion of semiotic process, with ethnographic and historical examples drawing mainly on our own research in Africa, Europe, and the United States. We discuss how to compare ethnographic cases; how ideologies can convince even without any linguistic manifestation; how sites of construal and analysis are located and connected in scalings of social activity; and how scholars of language are embedded in social history and ideological projects. Beyond social studies of language, the book shows that ideological work of all kinds – in politics, knowledge-making, embodiment, economics – is fundamentally communicative. So are the social relations and institutions, identities and communities, that ideologies authorize.

In short, the book's goal is to develop a semiotic basis for ideological study and critique of social life. With our approach to ideology as semiotic process and ideological work, we address – and challenge – anthropologists, sociolinguists, and others who study social difference, politics, economics, language, and (meta)discourse in everyday relations of power.

Exhibits: Illustrative Examples

We begin with several brief "exhibits" – examples bearing upon a basic puzzle: How is differentiation in social life manifested or even created by expressive form? How, in turn, are differences in expressive form linked to differentiation in social life? Some examples show the seriousness of the matters involved; others are humorous. With these vignettes, we raise questions that orient the book. Where do we find ideological work? How does it make some construals

and evaluations persuasive? How does a focus on differentiation help in understanding ideologized visions? How are details of speech connected to social positions and institutions? In what senses are politics, hierarchy, and social action implicated?

Each of our exhibits focuses on a topic in the social study of language: (1) national language and national character, (2) social types and personalities, (3) social scenes and activities, (4) political stakes in discourses about speech.

Exhibit 1: Wicked French

We often hear someone allege that a language reflects something about its speakers' character – and if national language, then national character. These propositions entail another: that a nation is distinct from other nations in character and in linguistic usage. The practices involved in self-conscious translation and second-language learning reify those oppositions and bring some of them into salience. For a (nonserious) illustration, consider the characteristics attributed to "the French" – and, by way of contrast, to "Americans" – in a passage from a humorous phrasebook, *Wicked French for the Traveler* (Example 0.1):

0.1 MAKING FRENCH NOISES WITH YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE

Americans find French accents charming. This is because they imagine that French people are sophisticated and intelligent.

The French find the accents of Americans speaking French nauseating. This is because they imagine that Americans are boorish and stupid.

… Many of the sounds made by French people are never made by English-speaking mouths. These peculiar noises are therefore difficult to describe and to imitate. Nevertheless, you must attempt to approximate a French accent if you hope to avoid being seen as a creature totally unworthy of respect, *un boucher de la langue sacrée* (a butcher of the holy tongue).

THE U IN STUPIDE

The u in stupide is a tough one, but learning it is crucial. Without it, you will be unable to say such things as:

These stinking	Ces truffes	Say trÿf pÿ-ONT
truffles are	puantes sont	sohn SŸR-fet.
overrated.	surfaites.	
Stop at my	Ne te rue pas	Nuh tuh rÿ pah
petticoat, Luc,	sur mon jupon,	sÿr mohn jÿ-
you beastly	Luc, espèce de	POHN, Lÿk, ess-
peasant!	rustaud brutal!	pess duh RŸS-
		toh brÿ-TAHL!

> Making the sound requires holding the lips out in an O shape, imitating the look of interest sometimes seen on the faces of chimpanzees, while making the sound "eee." It does *not* sound like "ooo." The sound, to our ears, suggests sharp disgust (Tomb 1989:6–8).

The very sounds of French, it is suggested, express the disgust and disrespect the author attributes to the whole nation in its attitude toward Americans. "Get respect in France with the phrasebook that turns the tables," recommends a blurb on the cover, and sure enough, the book offers insults galore with which the American traveler can counter the arrogant Gaul who actually insists that Americans – Americans!! – learn to speak a language other than English.

At the risk of belaboring a text that is not meant to be taken seriously, one might ask, what relationship between language and speakers is being suggested in this passage? There would be nothing especially humorous about claiming that people can express their feelings through the way they talk, or that culturally specific ideas might be reflected in some aspect of language. But a standardized language's phonological system is not a prime candidate for these effects. Presumably some of the passage's humor lies, therefore, in its description of phonological structure as directly reflecting cultural constructs, and in its proposal that the mouth movements producing those sounds result, perhaps automatically, from a characteristic feeling-state. No linguist today would accept such claims, which are indeed treated here as ridiculous. Yet, what is supposedly more ridiculous is the idea that pronouncing French well could be so valued that people who fail to do so are objects of contempt, even if they are Americans. So the humor rests also, and crucially, upon evaluations of national languages and their speakers. There is also the pseudo-phonetic transcription that makes French look particularly alien and deprives it of the appearance of standardness. And there is the content of the example sentences, about "overrated" French food ingredients and "beastly" amorous behavior. French language becomes just another "overrated" cultural item.

Other books in the "Wicked" series present German, Italian, and Spanish. We found the Spanish one conspicuously unfunny, however. As Jane Hill (2008) has pointed out, there is a lot of mock Spanish in the North American air already, and its use points to global power arrangements, local inequalities, and references to language as a stand-in for race. Given the easy slippage from national language to stereotyped national character, all these books now strike us as more problematic in their implicit ideological work than they at first appeared.

Exhibit 2: The Pirate's Progress

Besides a nation's citizenry, other social types too may be conventionally imagined as having special linguistic practices and characteristic identifying

signs. Take pirates. Many people who have never met a real pirate know what they should sound like. While teaching an undergraduate Stage Dialects class, Phil Timberlake found that his students were all able to produce pirate speech: "The room immediately filled with swaggering, snarling students saying, 'Make him walk the plank,' 'Aye, matey,' 'More rum, m'boy,' and the rhotic verbal exclamation, 'Arr!'" (Timberlake 2003:85). These are of course English-speaking pirates, and of an earlier century, if the vaguely seventeenth- to eighteenth-century costumes sold as pirate outfits in American stores for Halloween are any guide. They are certainly not the pirates of today, such as those who reputedly ply the seas off the Somali coast. In the absence of real-world models, the likely source of this widespread stereotype is in popular fiction and film.

Timberlake identifies the literary source as Robert Louis Stevenson's (1993 [1883]) *Treasure Island*, which describes its pirate characters' voices as growling, grunting, roaring, raging, barking, hoarse, and full of oaths. It also supplies expressions like "lubbers" and "Shiver me timbers!" The film source is primarily the actor Robert Newton from performances in the 1950s. There were earlier renderings of pirate speech in films, notably Lionel Barrymore's hoarse growling style in *Treasure Island* (1934). But it was Newton who appeared in three widely viewed pirate movies in rapid succession: *Treasure Island* (1950), *Blackbeard the Pirate* (1952), and *Long John Silver* (1954). Newton brought his own native (England's) West Country dialect to these films, while exaggerating its rhotics, frequently inserting "Arrr!" and uttering his lines in a loud, hoarse growl. These films were hugely popular, as was Newton's character, although critics panned his performance as over the top.

The pirate's hoarse, ragged voice, rendered as if damaged by too much rum and shouting, is matched by pirate characters' other mutilations: (variously) scarred faces, missing legs, missing fingers, missing hands, and blinded eyes. The pirates who speak this way wear ragged and patched clothing, their shirts and cloaks damaged just as their bodies are. Their damaged voices, bodies, and apparel seem to mirror a damaged moral compass, for these pirates are represented as cruel, blasphemous, even demonic.

The conventions of pirate speech can be significant only insofar as they are distinctive, contrasting with other ways of speaking. In *Treasure Island* the narrator, Jim Hawkins, speaks and writes in standard English; in many films up through the 1950s, actors playing Hawkins and those playing heroes or innocents speak in a normative voice, usually with American accents (largely unmarked for region). Even their clothing is cleaner and more intact. They, and their standard language, are the voice of moral authority, while pirates are antiauthoritarian and antiestablishment, by definition. Pirates' distinctiveness is something that has emerged over

time, however. In an earlier century, the line between privateers (authorized to attack ships of rival governments) and pirates was very thin. Some pirates even gained official posts; Henry Morgan (1635–1688), for example, though at best a privateer, became lieutenant governor of Jamaica. In works by Daniel Defoe (e.g., 1720, 1999 [1724]), pirates, whether real or fictional, are scarcely distinct from other kinds of thieves or, indeed, from other characters. Defoe occasionally contrasts pirates' "roar" and cursing with the "quietness and peace" of people and places ruled by good government (1999 [1724]:182). If a Defoe pirate (like Captain Singleton) sincerely repents, however, he is excused from his crimes and doesn't even have to give back the booty.

To be sure, differences between Defoe's and Stevenson's depictions of pirates are partly due to evolving literary standards and techniques. But they are also due to historical changes in maritime warfare, policing, and criminal careers. By Stevenson's day, privateers were largely a thing of the past. Those who robbed ships on the open sea were presumably pirates.

In the nineteenth century, as pirates become more clearly differentiated from non-pirates, the pirate category itself – in literature, at least – begins to subdivide. The men represented with "pirate speech" and tattered clothing are rank-and-file pirates of peasant or working-class background. Contrasting with these is the Byronic or romantic pirate, exemplified in Byron's 1814 poem *The Corsair* and Walter Scott's 1822 novel *The Pirate*. The romantic pirate comes from a higher social class but questions the status quo. He becomes a pirate because of some betrayal or false accusation that causes him to flee conventional authority. Though engaging in piracy, he is esteemed by his followers, performs many chivalrous acts, and is redeemed by love. In film, *Captain Blood* (1935), starring Errol Flynn in his first major swashbuckling role, represents this kind of pirate. As a "good" pirate, Captain Blood speaks in a cultivated British manner: normative grammar and Received Pronunciation (RP) – apart from a few minor phonetic lapses by the Australian-born Flynn.

Yet, even among higher class pirates differentiations have emerged. If Captain Blood is the good pirate, Captain Hook (in Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan*) – educated at Eton – is not. Captain Hook's "elegant diction" is thoroughly RP as well, but he is the evil English aristocrat, a social type available to writers by Barrie's time and certainly available to post–World War II American productions. Differentiations continue; space does not permit considering more recent iterations.

In short, history has played a role in the evolution of pirate social types and the pirate speech register, affording continuing processes of differentiation even while the "pirate accent" – instructions in which are now available on the internet – has become solidified and familiar.

Exhibit 3: Malinowskian Magic

Bronislaw Malinowski's descriptions of life on the Trobriand Islands, where he did fieldwork for two years between 1915 and 1918, are anthropological classics. In one of his books, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935), he offered a thesis about how and why the language of magic is deemed efficacious by its practitioners. The description emphasizes the opaqueness and irrationality of the language of magic:

> All magical verbiage shows a very considerable coefficient of weirdness, strangeness and unusualness. … We started from the observation that magic in all languages and at all times, and certainly in the Trobriands, almost ostentatiously displays words which are avowedly meaningless. … The mysterious and sacred words which are supposed to have a direct hold over reality need not conform to the rules of the grammar and word formations of ordinary speech. (Malinowski 1978 [1935]:221, 223–224)

Such language is impossible, he claims, for a European observer to interpret without help:

> Unless a competent commentator is secured who, in each specific case, will interpret the elements of weirdness, the allusions, the personal names or the magical pseudonyms, it is impossible to translate magic. Moreover, … there has developed a body of linguistic practice – use of metaphor, opposition, repetition, negative comparison, imperative and question with answer – which, though not developed into any explicit doctrine makes the language of magic specific, unusual, quaint. (1978 [1935]: 222)

What Malinowski describes, in many passages and textual commentaries in *Coral Gardens*, as the lexicon, grammar, and prosody that distinguish magical language from ordinary language in the Trobriands, a linguist today might call register differentiation. Registers (in this sense) include ways of speaking used by the same speakers but in different social situations – here, the rituals in which magic spells are uttered, as opposed to ordinary conversation. Outside the special scene of spell utterance, he finds, Trobrianders are as rational and pragmatic as anyone else. Moreover, a similar differentiation in registers can be found among Europeans, Malinowski suggests, in the contrast between the language of science and the language of advertising, political oratory, and beauty treatments (1978 [1935]:237). These instances of "modern savagery" show, he argues, that the difference between "native" and European is only a relative matter; it is only a question of how many domains of life evoke "magical verbiage." The differentiation of savage and modern is made into a differentiation internal to a single language and way of life – be it the Trobriand *or* the European.

Malinowski's interest in rationality and in comparisons between "natives" and Europeans led him to look closely at language, to transcribe many texts of spells and formulae, and to discuss register differentiation at some length. But perhaps it drew his attention away from other aspects of Trobriand thinking about language. For example, a Trobriand concept of "hard words" (*biga peula*; Weiner 1984) points to their concern for how language conveys truth or social tactfulness, and for the nature of truth in discourse. Evidently, Trobrianders are much interested in language's involvement in moral evaluation, and in its role in creating or destroying social connectedness. A similar interest is reflected, too, in the ways they mobilize regional linguistic repertoires in inter-island contacts and trading. The distribution of languages in this part of the Pacific differentiates regions; for example, there is a language spoken on the island of Dobu that is distinct from Kiriwinian (the Trobriand language). But multilingualism is widespread, and there are complex intercalations of regional languages in the speeches accompanying the exchange of goods between islands. Even though these language alternations, translations, and mixings seem to play some important part in the *kula* exchanges of ritual goods – exchanges whose significance Malinowski discusses at length – he merely mentions these points about language without developing them in his analysis.

This example shows how differentiations among expressive forms can distinguish among social activities and effects – and how, in Trobrianders' ideologized interpretations anyway, their effectiveness is persuasive. Yet, it also shows that a scholar's intellectual preoccupations, important as they are, can lead him to ignore or downplay observations a later scholar, less invested in broad comparisons between "savages" and Europeans, might find crucial.

Exhibit 4: Speaking Freely of Speech

How do people define "speech" and "speakers"? These seem self-evident concepts, yet there are complex philosophies that argue about them, and the various definitions are involved in international relations. Arguments in a US Supreme Court case differentiated two views of speech and speakers. They contrast on several dimensions: Can speech be a material object or not? Who and what can be a speaker in politics? And need one know the identity of the speaker to detect the truth or falsity of speech? The Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, like many legal cases, affords an ethnographic opportunity. What do the two parties' presumptions tell us about political imaginaries? How do these presumptions connect historical and international contexts that at first seem quite distinct?

In the *Citizens United* case, the Supreme Court struck down a 2002 bipartisan law that aimed to counteract corruption in campaign financing by

restricting some forms of spending in political campaigns. The Constitution's First Amendment guarantees that Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech. The Court ruled, in a five to four decision, that this gives business corporations and unions the right to spend as much money as they wish to directly support or target particular candidates. Unlimited spending by corporations and unions through political action committees was already legal. Freedoms of commercial speech were already guaranteed. The *Citizens United* decision lifted constraints on *direct* election spending by corporations and unions, using their general funds. In national polls, people of all political persuasions were overwhelmingly opposed to the decision. Some groups organized protests to dispute this interpretation of the First Amendment, saying, "money is not speech" and "corporations are not people."

Those mottos were clever, but they were not legal argumentation. Let us briefly sketch some of the legal issues on both sides before contrasting the political images they elaborated and relied on for their persuasiveness. The Court's majority argued that "prohibition on corporate … expenditures is a ban on speech" and it must end because "political spending is protected speech" under the First Amendment. Indeed, an earlier Court decision had established that suppression by a legislature of the financial resources necessary to create or publish political speech is constitutionally equivalent to suppression of speech itself, and the Court tends to accept its own precedents (Post 2014:46). Opponents dissented, responding that as a matter of common sense, money is *not* the same as speech: You cannot pay for a hamburger simply by talking. Money is a material thing, they said, without propositional "content," and without a responsible, identifiable speaker. Thus, it would be better to regulate how speech is paid for, while protecting speech itself, rather than declaring money to be speech. Indeed, before *Citizens United*, campaign contributions were regulated for more than a century with no one worrying about a violation of free speech (Wright 1976; Kairys 2010).

What about defining "speaker"? Government has an interest in safeguarding democracy by support of an engaged and informed electorate. Therefore, the First Amendment specially protects *political* speech. In this case, the Court said, individuals who associate together in a business, "a corporate form," are being treated as "disfavored speakers." They are like victims of a hostile government. "The censorship that we now confront is vast in its reach," said the Court's majority, because by limiting corporate financing of election-related speech, "the government has muffled voices … of the economy. … And [so] the electorate has been deprived of information, knowledge and opinion vital to its function" (cited in Toobin 2012). Corporations have not historically had the protection of the First Amendment for political speech. But, the Court argued, making speech available as a source of information for the public is what matters, not the identity of the speaker.

The dissenting justices thundered back that the First Amendment is not a blanket protection of all speech, as such. Its application has always distinguished among speakers, for instance more protection for civilians, less for the military. The First Amendment protects the dignity of individual *opinion*, choice, and political engagement. Although corporations are "legal persons" for some purposes, they do not have human dignity, or individual opinion, or a range of political interests. Corporate opinion is always constrained by the single legal and fiduciary obligation to make a profit. By contrast, the key political speech act of natural persons is choice in voting. Corporations are a different kind of entity: they cannot vote. Dissenters argued that the Court should not protect political speech by corporations under the First Amendment (Dworkin 2010; Winkler 2018).

The contrasts are striking: One view takes speech to be a material thing, equivalent to money, and independent of speakers. The other takes speech to be different from material objects, and freedom of speech to be embodied only in natural persons. Quite different political visions were invoked. For supporters, the decision was a victory over censorship and toward an open, dynamic marketplace of ideas (Abrams 2017). For opponents, the decision's vision was not of active citizens seeking to make their diverse opinions known, but of passive, closed-minded consumers, attending to messages from faceless corporations (Teachout 2014): they worried that disembodied corporate speech, framed as "information," misleads those who don't know that corporations' interest in politics is limited to enhancing profits.

Disagreement among the justices was strong. Yet, they and Americans of all political persuasions unite in support of First Amendment guarantees of free speech when comparing the United States to other countries. An important distinction among people within the country disappears in a wider comparison to other political systems. To see this, let us look at how exactly the justices and their allies characterized speech and speakers.

They used telling terms: "censorship" and "marketplace" and judgments of "openness" and "closedness," "activity" and "passivity." These expressions powerfully echoed the talk of past eras. The First Amendment's history is revealing. Enacted in 1791, it was never invoked in the nineteenth century. The suppression of speech and writing then went unremarked. But in 1918, labor activists and pacifists protesting the First World War were harshly punished, leading several justices to argue for the protection of political dissent. After the Second World War, the free speech clause of the First Amendment was reinterpreted as a general protection of antigovernment opinion (Stone 2004; Weinrib 2016). Free speech became an emblem of the United States, its "brand" in international relations during the Cold War. It stood for an "open" active society and capitalist markets. Communist opponents were charged with being "closed" by censoring speech and restricting markets. But the Cold War is long over;