

BOOK REVIEW

Christopher Hart. *Discourse, grammar and ideology: Functional and cognitive perspectives.* London: Bloomsbury, 2014. x + 216 pp.

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John Ellis, Emeritus Professor of German Literature at the University of Santa Cruz, California in his 1993 book *Language, thought and logic* – a book which outlines something of the sorry tale of linguistics in the second half of the 20th century – argues that linguistic concepts are “among the most basic tools of thought in all intellectual inquiry”. This, he suggests, is “part of the uniqueness of linguistic theory... that no other field is likely to have so great an impact on so many other fields when new thought arises in it”. Thus, “the stakes involved in theorizing about language are ... always likely to be relatively high” (Ellis 1993: 2).

The problem of ideology is a case in point. As we pass the halfway mark of Trump’s first term as president, as bloody wars continue in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as we witness the highest numbers of displaced people ever on record – I could go on – we see everywhere the power of ideologies to rationalize inhuman and absurd forms of living. Some argue that language has become even more powerful in the modern period (e.g. Firth 1937; Malešević 2010). To take just one example of ideological patterning, ideology is indispensable for the institutions whose business is organized violence, and as their reach has extended (the 20th century was the most violent century of recorded history), so ideologies in defence of killing have had to step up (Malešević 2010, 2017). Ideology has had to bridge the gap between our modern commitment to universal human rights, at the same time that we have never lived in such a violent era, a contradiction so profound that Malešević has called it an “ontological dissonance” (Malešević 2010). This example should lead us to agree with Bourdieu that language has power beyond our wildest dreams.

The importance of ideology has made it a central explanandum in sociology and critical theory: few scholars in these fields have not turned their attention to this problem. It would be difficult to find a theorist of ideology who did not think language and meaning are in some way crucial to constructing and perpetuating ideologies. In linguistics too, the link between language and ideology has been so insistent that most linguistic schools have found their way to this problem. Though ideology has been completely ignored in one of the dominant linguistic paradigms of the 20th century, the problem of ideology produced a whole field of discourse studies (e.g. critical linguistics/critical discourse analysis/critical

discourse studies), and there are studies of ideology from virtually all other linguistic paradigms.

Cognitive linguistics (CL) was notably late into the game. Though van Dijk has long asserted a place for cognitivist thinking in understanding ideology, his dedicated monograph on the topic was published late in the 20th century (van Dijk 1998). Though metaphor in Lakoff's terms has come to be considered relevant to the problem of ideology, there was not a single use of the word "ideology" in *Women, fire and dangerous things: what categories reveal about the mind* (except for its use in an entry in the bibliography) and only one in *Metaphors we live by* (Lakoff and Johnson 2008). The turn of the 21st century brought a more direct dedication to the topic from scholars in CL. In 2001, two companion volumes were published under the title *Language and ideology*, but with distinct subtitles: one "theoretical cognitive approaches", and the other "descriptive cognitive approaches", edited by Dirven et al. (2001a, 2001b). The 2007 *Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics* includes an entry on CL and ideology (Dirven et al. 2007), as does the 2014 *Bloomsbury companion to cognitive linguistics* (Koller 2014).

Hart's 2014 book, *Discourse, grammar and ideology: functional and cognitive perspectives*, can be seen as part of a growing tide of attention to ideology from CL scholars. His book is organized around these two general theoretical perspectives, with functional perspectives outlined in the first three chapters and cognitive perspectives in Chapters 4–6. The functional perspectives include Halliday's "SFG" (Chapter 1), Martin and White's appraisal framework (Chapter 2), and "SFG"/CDA inspired multimodal analysis (e.g. Machin et al. Chapter 3). With respect to CL, Hart brings ideas from cognitive grammar (e.g. Langacker, Chapter 4), conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, Chapter 4), conceptual blends (e.g. Fauconnier & Turner, Chapter 5) and discourse space theory (Chilton & Cap, Chapter 6). Notably, Hart suggests that his own work has superseded that of van Dijk's, on the basis that "mental models" are not propositional but "conceptual and imagistic" (p.109). With the book under 200 pages in length, naturally this broad coverage has to come at the cost of detailed discussion of any single framework.

The recent CL work acknowledges the much longer interest in ideology from social and functional perspectives, to the degree that Dirven et al. (2007:1223) argue there is something of a "David and Goliath" relationship between CL and CDA, with CL in the role of David. Hart argues that "there is no reason, in principle, why CDA should restrict itself to the application of SFG" (p.8). The structure of his book is rhetorically suited to set up the limits of Halliday's framework, to open up space in the understanding and analysis of ideology which CL could take up. While presenting concepts from functional linguistics useful for the study of ideology in the first three chapters, Hart argues that Halliday's theory fails to

grasp the deep political dimension of language (p.7), and ignores the “cognitive reflexes of representation and evaluation in discourse” (p.11). Its categories are “strict”, so that it “is not always amenable to analyzing authentic textual data” (p.189). It fails to deal with the problem of “cognitive equivalence”, that is, the question of whether the meaning imputed to a text by an analyst is the meaning taken by the hearer or reader. CL, he argues, is “more flexible”, “is generally more encompassing” and offers “finer levels of specification” (p.189). While “SFG” is “speaker-oriented”, CL models an “intersubjective conceptual space” and offers “a psychological plausible mode of grammar” (p.189).

With Halliday’s *Collected works* (10 volumes published between 2002 and 2007, with a later 11th volume published in 2013) now available, it has never been easier to read him carefully. Halliday (2003a) provides a short summary (under 30 pages) of the key assumptions on which he bases his claims about how language works. Yet the greater accessibility of his work has not stemmed the tide of poor presentations of Halliday’s ideas, and Hart’s book, sadly, shows just one more example of this genre. Hart’s choice to reduce Halliday’s framework to “SFG” – to systemic functional *grammar*, not systemic functional *linguistics* – signaled at the outset, to me at least, that Hart was not a serious reader of Halliday’s work.

As a linguist with a deep and wide understanding of language, Halliday’s theoretical writings are extremely carefully worded. In the development of his assumptions, or “working hypotheses” about language, Halliday has not only formulated theoretical concepts, but meditated on the nature of linguistic theorizing, the problems of categories and the relations between forms of abstraction in linguistics, including, but not limited to, their ineffability (linguistic categories, as Firth noted, are simply language turned back on itself), their fuzziness, the nature of descriptive versus theoretical categories, the need for a distinction between “grammar” and “grammatics”, and the various perspectives from which one needs to examine a theoretical category in order to argue for its value (his “trinocular view”).

Halliday’s basic assumptions about language – like those of any theory – are not falsifiable. They are what his theory simply takes for granted, and can be defended only on the grounds that they help scholars see language in useful ways: the proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating. To evaluate Halliday’s theory, these assumptions are the first port of call, since they establish the first principles of the theory, from which all else follows. All linguistic theories take some assumptions for granted. I would suggest that Halliday is perhaps unique in modern linguistics in his degree of explicitness about these first principles, at the same time that, despite his firm commitment to them, he understands that they have the status of an ideology.

Reading Hart's summary of Halliday was, to me, painful. It showed a carelessness in his own use of language that is all too common in linguistics – and surely we, of all disciplinary scholars, should understand the importance of choosing one form of wording over another. I could give many examples, but I direct readers to Figure 1.3 on page 22, which Hart labels the “canonical clause structure at three levels of realization”. Hart imputes to Halliday three “levels” in this presentation: “lexicogrammatic” (which he labels with group and phrase structure categories) “semantic” (with labels as “process”, “participant” and “circumstance”) and “functional” (to which Hart attributes categories Halliday proposes under the interpersonal function, such as Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement). Though Halliday's categories are fuzzy, they each have a distinct place within his architecture.

Hart's account shows that he fails to appreciate the distinction between constituency and realization, and does not understand the significance of Halliday's metafunctional distinctions. Hart's companion presentation of instantiation (Figure 1.2, p. 22) is also confused, with two clines (society – ideology – institution – situation; system (language) – discourse – genre – text), possibly related by vectors of realization (the vertical lines, e.g., between society and language, ideology and discourse, among others), though this is not clear. Hart leaves us to infer the meaning of “discourse” (he offers two definitions earlier in the book, without explaining which meaning is relevant here) and “genre”, which is Martin's, not Halliday's, concept. For the record, Halliday's model of these dimensions is set out in Figure 1. His account of these relations in his 1992 paper “How do you mean?” (see Halliday 2002) is crucial to understanding what Halliday's theory means for the ideological function of language.

Hart concludes that Halliday's framework is not up-to-speed for the complex task of understanding the “Machievellian function” of language (p. 7). Halliday's approach “fails to recognize that a fundamental function of communication is not just to exchange information or express opinions but in so doing to convince others or to coerce them into acting in particular ways” (p. 7). But the question Hart should be asking is whether concepts like metafunction, realization and stratification – key assumptions Halliday makes about the internal organization of language – are relevant to understanding the deeply powerful nature of language, and its relationship to ideology.

Since I share Halliday's ideological orientation, then naturally I am convinced by Halliday's account. For me, it explains the “semiotic big bang” (Lukin 2019), the extended moment in our evolutionary history in which language's ideological potential was born. As our species moved into modern language – a semiotic system whose complexity is defined by the multidimensions of metafunction, realization and stratification – the “collective human consciousness created a semiotic

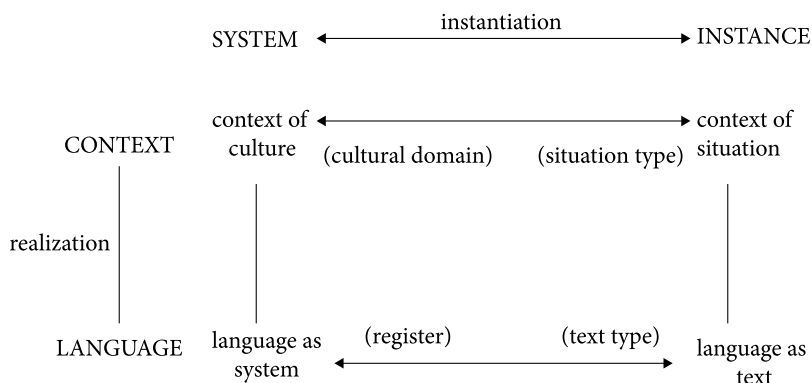


Figure 1. Language and context, system and instance (Halliday 1991, republished as Halliday 2007a)

Note: culture instantiated in situation, as system instantiated in text. Culture realized in/construed by language; same relation as that holding between linguistic strata (semantics: lexicogrammar: phonology: phonetics).

Cultural domain and register are “sub-systems”: likeness viewed from “system” end. Situation type and text type are “instance types”: likeness viewed from “instance” end.

space which is truly elastic, in that it can expand in any number of directions” (Halliday 2002:356). The profound elasticity of language, rooted in collective human experience, is the *sine qua non* for the possibility of ideology. Since ideology is itself a contested concept, I note here that Halliday favours Gramsci’s view of ideology as “a chaos of meaning-making practices, within and among which there is incoherence, disjunction and conflict – which is why it always contains within itself the conditions for its own transformation into something else” (Halliday 2007b:120).

Hart’s comment – that there is no reason “in principle” why CDA scholars should stick with Halliday – is paradoxical, because linguistic theories are, simply, all about principles. The reason to choose and use Halliday, Lakoff, van Dijk, Vološinov or anyone else is very much about principles: to reason about theory is to reason about such principles. But Hart’s rejection of Halliday is not on principle – it is not based on dealing with the principles on which Halliday’s account of language is based. Even focusing himself particularly on grammar has not helped, as Hart seems unable to deploy the grammatical infrastructure of Halliday’s theory. For example, the discussion of voice (p. 31) ignores middle voice; the issue of markedness is misunderstood (p. 31); the interpersonal function is declared to be realized in the system of modality (p. 44); and his grammatical analysis shows a lack of understanding of the unit of clause (see e.g. Example 1 on page 26; Example 11 on page 28; and Example 15 on page 32; and see the previous example of Figure 1.3).

Hart argues that ideology needs to be seen from “a cognitive perspective” and begins with the epistemological commitments – the first principles if you like – of CL, shared across several such theories. Though these are useful by being stated, they reveal more than they say. While cognitive linguists – and Lakoff’s work is front and centre in this regard – argue that meaning is dependent on embodied experience (the first of the four stated epistemological commitments of CL), the next logical question is not asked. What does this assumption – and despite Hart’s belief that conceptual metaphors, blends, among others, may one day be revealed as “psychologically real”, these are no more than taken-for-granted beliefs, just like Halliday’s assumptions outlined above – mean for the way CL models language? I will suggest below that this, and the three other epistemological commitments Hart outlines, similarly reveal the limitations of CL for understanding the ideological potential of language because they all seek to constrain the power of language. Indeed – and weirdly – CL returns to the discipline the outmoded “base-structure” complex of Marx, this time with cognitive processes as the base, which language is always dependent on, and constrained by. In these models, language is once again epiphenomenal, and, typically, a vehicle for further “discoveries” about cognitive structure.

The three further epistemological commitments of CL, according to Hart, are as follows: that language is dependent on cognitive processes such as memory, imagination, reason, perception; that language is a system of “conventionalized units or symbolic assemblies in which both lexical and grammatical forms ‘point to’ particular conceptual structures, which are image-schematic in nature”; and that “language encodes construal”, elaborated by Hart in the terms that a given situation can be conceptualized in different ways, and language forms impose these various alternative conceptualisations.

Take for instance the claim that language is dependent on perception. As always, such claims can be understood in different ways – and I hope not to misconstrue what Hart is arguing. I do not think he means that language, as Halliday has argued, is the product of the contradiction between our inner and outer worlds. Let me put Halliday’s position in a fuller quote, since it shows a rejection by Halliday of Marx’s base/superstructure account of language:

Language is not a superstructure on a base; it is a product of the conscious and the material impacting each on the other – of the contradiction between our material being and our conscious being, as the antithetical realms of experience.
(Halliday 2003b:145)

In this formulation, the rise of language depends on a process in which perception – the receipt of outside experience into a conscious being – is part of the mix. But Hart tends towards the position that perception is unshaped by semiosis, and

language has an add-on relationship to it, though his wording is at times hard to interpret. For instance, on Point 2 above, what is language doing if it is “pointing to” conceptual structures? By extension, what is language if it is doing this? The larger position, however, is clear – that conceptual structures pre-exist language, and are not dependent on it. Rather, the dependency is, for CL, in the other direction. Lakoff, for instance, is quite clear that his conceptual structures give us our basic categories, and are pre-linguistic and universal (Lakoff 1987, 2018). The question, as I have argued already, is to ask what such assumptions (they are not “discoveries” as Lakoff likes to suggest) mean for a theory of language? Crucially, the implication of these epistemological commitments is that, for CL, language and thinking are two distinct processes. At some point they intersect, at which point language can be ideological. Thus, CL also, by implication, is claiming that language is only partially ideological, though in what part or under what circumstances language is open to ideology is not made clear (Lukin 2019).

Hart gives the claim of the priority of conceptual structures his own twist. Via an engagement with multimodal analysis, he goes on to argue that visual and spatial experience may determine “the meaningful basis of much of language”, allowing him to propose a “single conceptual system which operates in both linguistic and visual discourse” (p.187). But the claim is a riff on an old story – essentially, it is a less nuanced form of Lakoff’s conceptual metaphor theory – and it fails to recognize something very important about language that helps explain why it is the engine room of ideology. Hart’s claim about the primordial role of “visuo-spatial experience” in the shaping of language values the iconicity of the visual mode in shaping meaning and grammar. But the power of grammar is partly that it liberates language from iconicity. This is a feature of the arbitrariness of the sign, which is one but not the only mode of realization in language, a point which Hart appears to overlook in his comparison of language and image (p.72). The arbitrariness of the sign gets renewed power when the whole abstract stratum of lexicogrammar evolves: the system now combines an arbitrary relation between lexicogrammar and the expression plane, with a natural relation between lexicogrammar the semantic stratum. As I have argued (Lukin 2019), the ideological power of language in part resides in language’s perfect balance between these two realization modes, one arbitrary, and one natural.

CL is predicated on a separation of language and thinking, and this is why it fails to explain why language has the incredible power we witness in the many and varied ideologies that shape our lives on every scale. Though Hart briefly mentions Vološinov’s work – he quotes *Marxism and the philosophy of language* in Chapter 2 (p.52) – Hart does not engage more fully with what is effectively the first semiotic account of ideology. If he had, he would see that Vološinov would consider ideas such as conceptual metaphor, scripts, blends, mental models and

others to be psychological positivism. It is not that Vološinov dismissed the psyche as crucial to understanding ideology – far from it. In his view, ideology and the psyche are in a dialectic relation. Ideology, he argues, requires the psyche to be a living phenomenon: it must “ring with subjective tones in order to remain a living sign and not be relegated to the honorary status of an incomprehensible museum piece” (Vološinov 1973:39). To impute universal structure to the mind – Lakoff rejects universal grammar, but essentially proposes a universal semantics via metaphors associated with space, time, event, causation, morality (see e.g. Lakoff 2018:lecture 8) – is, in Vološinov’s view, to “depart either up into the super-existential empyrean of transcendentalism or down into the presocial recesses of the psychophysical, biological organism” (Vološinov 1973:12).

I would have thought that one of the most obvious principles from which to begin a linguistic study of ideology, is that with respect to ideology, the mind appears to be infinitely plastic, with meaning the prime mover in the contents of communal belief systems. The brain is not a tabular rasa – but thinking and language are two sides of the same coin. The first coherent formulation of this view, now recognized as the linguistic relativity hypothesis, was over 270 years ago, with Condillac’s (1714–1780) *Essay on the origin of human knowledge*, published in 1746. Condillac’s position was an argument against Descartes – against reason as something inbuilt and universal. Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836), well known in the history of ideology as the French Enlightenment thinker who coined the term “ideology”, took the idea of the study of ideas from reading Condillac. Thus, the history of the concept of ideology is tied up with the history of debates about linguistic relativity.

With the 21st century continuing to show us how profoundly irrational humans can be, here we are in linguistics still arguing over the relationship of language and thought. Ideologies show us that the range of ideas communities have held or do hold is mind-boggling, and is ever-expanding. Ideologies, like language, permeate every part of our existence, from the ways we make love to the ways we make war. Though it is a standard formulation to suggest that Halliday has no “cognitive theory” (Hart, and see also van Dijk 2008, especially Chapter 2), it is simply that Halliday, in a scholarly tradition that extends back over 270 years to Condillac, but via Whorf, Firth, Malinowski, Vološinov, Saussure and others, treats language and thinking as indivisible – with ideology similarly inseparable from them.

I have perhaps unfairly projected my general frustration with CL to Hart’s book – it certainly gives me no pleasure to write this critique of his book. I was glad to see a new linguistics book devoted to the topic of ideology, and had hoped to find a fellow traveler on this topic. But, as Hasan suggested 30 years ago (Hasan 1988), we should hold up our linguistic theories against the problem of how and

why language is so powerful. While I will continue to follow the developments of CL in this field, its separation of language and thinking prevents it being open to the profound interdependency of language and ideology, the implications of which linguists should be trying harder to bring out.

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