

The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology

The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology is a broad survey of linguistic anthropology, featuring contributions from prominent scholars in the discipline. Each chapter presents a brief historical summary of research in the field and discusses topics and issues of current concern to people doing research in linguistic anthropology. The handbook is organized into four parts – Language and Cultural Productions; Language Ideologies and Practices of Learning; Language and the Communication of Identities; and Language and Local/Global Power – and covers current topics of interest at the intersection of the two subjects, while also contextualizing them within discussions of fieldwork practice. Featuring 30 contributions from leading scholars in the field, *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology* is an essential overview for students and researchers interested in understanding core concepts and key issues in linguistic anthropology.

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The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology

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Contributors

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Preface

The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology is divided into four sections representing different areas of focus within the discipline. The first, Language and Cultural Productions, includes articles summarizing some traditional concerns in linguistic anthropology and offering new insights into analyses of semantic categories (Dimmendaal), verbal art (Mannheim), and kinship terminologies (Wierzbicka). An additional chapter in this section offers an extensive review of findings in research on gesture, that important mode of communication often overlooked in linguistics studies (Streeck). And finally we are made aware of the significance of studies venturing into new frontiers in communicative interactions, i.e. the cloud (LeBlanc-Wories).

Part II of the handbook, Language Ideologies and Practices of Learning, begins with insights about the topic of language ideologies, a concern that clearly underlies and unites much of what we understand speakers know, consciously or unconsciously, about the covert meanings that they transmit and interpret when producing discourse (Kroskrity). The next contribution offers an analysis of the specific context that exemplifies the ways in which linguistic and cultural ideologies are revealed through discourse in a setting where subordinate speakers navigate their interactions with more powerful actors (Huayhua). The remaining three chapters in this section deal with different themes in language acquisition and socialization studies. The first gives us an overview of research in the field (Paugh), and is followed by an emphasis on language socialization in different linguistic and cultural contexts (Stoll), and by a focus on the way in which marginalization affects language socialization (García-Sánchez).

The next section, Part III, entitled Language and the Communication of Identities, concerns just that, i.e. how speakers transmit, embody, and enact their social and personal identities through linguistic and other communicative choices (both in what they choose and in what they do not choose). The first article, although focusing specifically on sexuality, more broadly attunes us to the significant issue of intersectionality (Leap). This reminds us that we are never conveying one identity or even an identity viewed in binary terms, but rather we simultaneously convey contextually based features of identities. The next three chapters in this section focus on specific issues: the first on gender (Pichler) and the next two on racial identities (Baugh) and the broader processes of racialization (Chun and Lo).

The last three articles in Part III are oriented towards other aspects of communication: the first on conversation and dialogue (Brody), the next on the important but often neglected topic of communicative practices in signed languages (Senghas), and the last on an exploration of new and emergent languages (Riley).

Part IV of the handbook, Language and Local/Global Power, is an extensive collection of chapters on the ways in which power, inequality, and marginalization affect language, languages, and discourse strategies. It begins with a comprehensive overview of the field of political economy and language (McElhinny). Then follow three chapters each examining

separate dimensions of how contemporary global policies and social formations are intertwined with languages and discourse: immigration (Pujolar), nationalism (Haque), and globalization (Jacquemet). The next is again a comprehensive overview: of research and theories in the development of creoles and their role in language change (Mufwene).

Two articles in Part IV investigate the ways in which discourse in the press conveys discriminatory and racist meanings (Wodak; Van Dijk). Discourse practices in the United States systems of courts and justice are addressed in the next two (Conley; Hirsch). And the final sequence of three chapters in Part IV explore, from different perspectives and with different conclusions, the topic of language endangerment and revitalization (Cowell; Brittain and MacKenzie; Meek).

I would like to thank Leah Babb-Rosenfeld of Routledge Publishers for suggesting the development of this handbook and Elyse Preposi of Routledge for helping to ready it for production. I also thank Kay Hyman, a freelance editor with Swales & Willis, for coordinating the copy editing process and Tom Newman of Swales & Willis for the final production stage. And I am grateful to all of the contributors for their participation. Their work is of course central to this handbook.

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Racism in the Press

Teun A. van Dijk

1 Introduction

This article presents a multidisciplinary account of the role of the mass media, and especially the press, in the daily reproduction of “white” racism in multicultural society. After a definition of racism as a system of social domination, controlled by the symbolic elites, the article summarizes the ways news production and news report structures presuppose, confirm, and reproduce the shared ethnic prejudices and ideologies on which the system is based.

2 Racism

Racism is defined here as a specific social system of domination in which ethnic groups and their members in various ways abuse their power in their interaction with other ethnic groups and their members (for detail, see Van Dijk, 1993). Historically, this has been especially the case for the domination by “whites” (Europeans and groups of European descent) of “non-whites,” such as people of African, Asian or Indigenous/Native American descent, so we shall focus here on “white racism.”

The system of racism consists of two major subsystems, a cognitive and an interactional one, better known as prejudice and discrimination, respectively. However, whereas traditionally prejudice is often seen as individual bigotry, it is here understood as a form of social cognition, as a system of negative attitudes about ethnic others shared by members of the dominant group (see Augoustinos, 2001; Dovidio, Glick & Rudman 2005).

These attitudes are based on, and organized by, a more general and fundamental racist ideology, featuring notions of superiority and priority of the dominant ethnic ingroup, and of inferiority of the dominated ethnic outgroup.

Racist ideology and the more specific negative attitudes (prejudices) it controls not only serve as the cognitive aspect of white group identity, but also as a legitimation of its power abuse in the many forms of ‘everyday racism’ (Essed, 1991) or discriminatory interaction – that is, the observable manifestation of the system of racism in everyday life (for general introductions to the study of racism, see, e.g., Garner, 2009; Rattansi, 2007).

3 Historical Perspective

Racism as a system of ethnic or racial domination is not limited to Europeans. Yet its most widespread and consequential form has been the “white” racism as invented and practiced by Europeans, e.g., from the legitimization of slavery and colonialism, until eugenics, the Holocaust, and current discrimination against non-European immigrants (of the vast number of histories of racism, see, e.g., Allen, 1994; Bjørgo & Witte, 1993; Hannaford, 1996). Indeed, white prejudice against non-Europeans, based on the idea of the superiority of the white “race,” goes back to Antiquity (Isaac 2004).

4 Critical Issues and Topic: The Discursive Reproduction of Racism

Ethnic prejudice, as the cognitive basis of discrimination, is not innate but learned, as is the case for all social attitudes and ideologies. It is learned by various forms of socialization within the dominant ingroup, especially by public discourse and interpersonal conversations influenced by such public discourse. Especially influential are the text and talk of politics, the mass media (including the internet), and education, where systematic attention is being paid to ethnic others, such as ethnic minorities or immigrants. Among the many forms of the discursive reproduction of racism, this article focuses on the role of the press in multicultural societies.

This discourse analytical study of racism not only has a cognitive and a discursive dimension but also an important social one, thus defining the triangular, multidisciplinary approach of this article. Dominant discourse in society, such as that of politics, the media, and education (including research), are controlled by social groups with specific privileges and power of access (Van Dijk, 2008b). Not anybody can speak in Parliament or Congress, write in the newspaper or in a textbook. The groups who do have special access to public discourse will be called the ‘symbolic elites’ (Van Dijk, 1993). They control public communication and thus influence, discursively, the beliefs of the dominant group and its members, in a very complex sociocognitive manner that will not be detailed here. It is important that, also along a social dimension, racism is not reduced to individual acts of everyday discrimination, but a form of systematic power abuse in everyday interaction, legitimated by the prejudices reproduced by the prevalent discourse of symbolic elites, who control epistemic and doxastic institutions such as those of politics, the media, and education.

Discourse has a specific role in the reproduction of racism. On the one hand, it is a form of social interaction among others. Hence, if racism is expressed as a form of discriminatory social interaction, this also applies to discourse, as is the case for prejudiced text and talk. On the other hand, we have assumed that ethnic prejudice and ideology are not innate but learned, and that such acquisition is largely discursive. So racist discourse is itself a form of power abuse and at the same time reproduces and legitimates the sociocognitive basis, the prejudices, of all forms of discriminatory action (including discourse) in society (for studies on racism and discourse, see, e.g., Blommaert & Verschuere, 1998; Jäger, 1992; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wetherell & Potter 1992; Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000).

5 Current Contributions and Research: The Press

Much, if not most, of what white people know about ethnic minorities or immigrants they find out from the mass media, especially the press, television, and the internet. To focus the discussion of this article, it will concern itself especially with the written press, today still a major source of information of the symbolic elites, also on politics and other media, and inextricably related to public debate and policies on ethnic affairs.

To understand the role of the press in the reproduction of racism, it is crucial not to limit the study to a simple content analysis of racial slurs or stereotypical topics in news and opinion articles, but engage in multidisciplinary study of press discourse and its cognitive and societal contexts (for books on racism in the press, see, e.g., Campbell, 2010; Cottle, 2000; Downing & Husband, 2005; Jäger & Link, 1993; Jiwani, 2006; Richardson, 2004; Van Dijk, 1991; Wilson, Gutiérrez & Chao, 2003).

5.1 *The Context of News Production*

In contemporary discourse studies it is crucial, first of all, to analyze not only texts but also their contexts, that is, the communicative situation as participants construe it in their minds as a specific type of mental model: context models (Van Dijk, 2008a). Indeed, the “same” text or talk may be racist in one communicative situation and not in another. Therefore, we also need to examine the production context of the various discourse genres of the press, featuring, e.g.:

- Setting (Time, Place)
- Participants (and their Identities, Roles, and Relations)
- Type of Communicative Action
- Aim and Goals of the Communicative Action
- Knowledge, Attitudes, and Ideologies of the Participants

This means that journalists during newsgathering and news production have a context model in mind with these categories controlling all their discursive and communicative conduct. Thus, in their context model they represent the following relevant knowledge of the communicative situation:

- i) where they are (as shown in the byline);
- ii) date and time (to meet a deadline);
- iii) that they are now acting in their identity as journalists and in their role of reporter or interviewer, and in a specific relation with their editors, on the one hand, or their news sources or news actors, on the other;
- iv) engaging in a specific kind of communicative interaction (e.g., a phone interview, assisting at a press conference, consulting the internet, etc.);
- v) with the aim of gathering information or writing a news article, and informing the public, and
- vi) with specific knowledge and attitudes about minorities, immigrants, or specific issues (such as immigration or quotas).

Since a white journalist writes not only in their identity as a journalist, but also, at least marginally, is aware of being a member of an ethnic group, all these activities and contexts may also be permeated by the influence of the ethnic attitudes of the journalist (a dimension often neglected in other studies of news production – see, e.g., Tuchman, 1978). In other words, in all phases of the production of discourse in the press, the ethnic identity of the journalist and other participants plays a fundamental role.

This will show, among other things, in the sources they find reliable and credible (typically symbolic elites of their own ethnic group – i.e., mostly white authorities for white journalists), which they will therefore approach with greater probability, in what incoming information they select and focus on, and in whose point of view is likely to be favored in news writing. Thus, in

our fieldwork among journalists in Amsterdam we found that press releases of minority groups were seldom found reliable, credible, or otherwise interesting, and were routinely discarded in favor of official (white) sources, such as the government, the police, or experts (Van Dijk, 1991).

The same is true for interviews with ethnically different sources or news actors, who may suffer bias – if only due to the attitude that such sources by definition favor their own group, an assumption seldom made in interviews with white authorities.

Finally, whereas many phases of the production of news discourse may already be ethnically biased, the same will be the case for the actual production of news reports, depending again on the knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies of the journalist – or, rather, as dominant in the newspaper. Detailed ‘epistemic analyses’ of news about ethnically different groups may reveal that lacking knowledge about the Others, as well as about their social and cultural context, may be one of the sources of biased reporting.

5.2 Structures of News

As suggested, it is not surprising that in such a biased production context the product, such as the news, editorials, columns, or feature articles, in many ways show ethnic bias. Let us therefore systematically examine some structures of news in the press and how these may be affected by such bias (for structures of news, see Bell, 1991; Van Dijk, 1988; Richardson, 2007).

5.2.1 Topics

The meaning of discourse is globally organized by macropropositions defining the topic, gist, or upshot of discourse (Van Dijk, 1980). Topics, as subjectively construed by the participants, are crucial for the production, comprehension, memory, and reproduction of discourse. In news production they represent the ‘plan’ a journalist has for the writing of a news report, and in the reception of news, it is the information readers tend to remember best – as we shall see below (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

News discourse, in general, may be about any public issue in the domains of society, politics, culture, sports, or entertainment. Yet, depending on the political orientation of a newspaper, some issues, and hence some topics, have more probability and more space, than others. For instance, as is the case for all polarized ideological discourse (Van Dijk, 1998), we read more about terrorism of Others against Us, than of Our forms of power abuse (such as colonialism, oppression, wars, etc.) against Them. The same is true for the coverage of immigrants and minorities. Research shows that news about ethnic Others is semantically less diverse than news about Us, and typically prefers to focus on topics such as:

- immigration as a problem or a threat, and once Others have immigrated
- integration problems, e.g., due to cultural (linguistic, religious, etc.) differences
- deviance and crime.

Controlled by underlying racist ideologies and specific ethnic attitudes, the Others and their actions are thus globally represented as Different, Deviant, and a Threat.

By the logic of polarized underlying ideologies, the representation of Our own ingroup, and its actors and institutions, is usually neutral or positive: We are portrayed as helping, supporting, or tolerating the Others, in our own or in their own countries. At the same time, the corollary of the ‘ideological square’ (Van Dijk, 1998) is that whereas the news will seldom report many positive stories about the Others – except in specific domains, such as sport and entertainment – it

also tends to ignore or mitigate negative topics about Us. So, topics on Our prejudices and racism are rare, unless committed by an Outgroup within the Ingroup, such as the Extreme Right, neo-Nazis, football hooligans, etc. Racism or xenophobia of the mainstream elites is largely ignored or denied. We see that macrostructures also define at least some of the aspects of what is usually rather vaguely described as the overall ‘framing’ of news.

5.2.2 *Headlines and Leads*

Of the schematic organization of news, the Summary, consisting of Headline and Lead, plays a crucial role precisely because they are the preferred textual categories for expression of topics. They strategically function for readers as explicit instructions on how to construe the overall meaning, macrostructure, or topics of news reports.

Although normatively and theoretically expressing the most important topic of a news report, headlines may also focus on other aspects of the news so as to manipulate the attention, understanding, and memory of the readers. Thus, an account of an otherwise largely peaceful demonstration may typically focus on the violence of a small group of demonstrators. Similarly, the headlines of the coverage of ‘race riots’ focus on black violence rather than on police violence. Stories about religious differences, e.g., on Muslim women, focus on Their deviance, such as wearing a hijab, rather than on Our prejudices, intolerance, or xenophobia.

5.2.3 *Local Semantics*

Overall semantic macrostructures of discourse not only define its topics but are typically expressed prominently (first, on top, and in larger type) in headlines. They also, and by definition, organize the local meanings of words and sentences of text and talk, as well as the processes of understanding and memory.

Local meanings of discourse are characterized by many properties, only some of which have been systematically studied in linguistics, such as modalities, metaphors, and presuppositions. Others are (still) ignored or unknown in mainstream research, as are the ways persons, actions, or events are described, implications, generalizations vs. specifications, functional relations, amount of detail, granularity, perspective and point of view, and so on.

For the analysis of news on minorities and immigrants, such local semantic analysis is especially relevant because at this level we encounter the more subtle ways news about Others may be biased. Thus, among many other characteristics of news about immigrants and minorities, research has shown the following semantic properties of news about Others:

- News events are generally described from the perspective of Us – i.e., our government, police, etc.
- Others tend to be described rather as group members than as individuals.
- The negative actions of Others are described with more detail, and those of Us with less detail.
- Negative attributes of Others (e.g., their violence) may be ‘falsely’ presupposed, and hence obliquely asserted, that is, even when there is no evidence of such negative characteristics.
- Negative attributes of Others are often implied when explicit assertion would appear too blatant.
- Our own negative actions against Them, if any, are described with modalities of necessity, that is, as inevitable – as is the case with police actions, limiting immigration, or expulsion of immigrants.
- Metaphors tend to emphasize the threatening nature of Others, as is stereotypically the case for the arrival of ‘waves’ of immigrants.

5.2.4 Local Syntax

Sentence syntax may vary in many ways in the expression of underlying semantic or pragmatic meanings, thus focusing on specific aspects of these propositions rather than on others. The ways agents of actions may be hidden or made less prominent by using passive constructions or nominalizations are well known. This is typically the case for negative actions of Our government, police, agencies, or authorities, against the Others. Thus, news may be about discrimination or xenophobia, without mentioning who exactly discriminates, or pretends to fear immigrants or minorities (Fowler, 1991; Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew, 1979).

5.2.5 The Lexicon

The ideological logic of negative Other presentation obviously also affects lexical choice. The Others can be described in many ways, some of which have more or less negative implications. Classic examples of biased political coverage describe Others in terms of terrorists, rebels, or freedom fighters, depending on Our ideological perspective.

The same is true for minorities or immigrants – as is well known from the long historical debate about, and the lexical development of, such expressions as *Negroes*, *Blacks*, *Afro-Americans* and *African Americans*, in media and politics, and more offensive words in less public contexts (see, e.g., Essed, 1997).

Similarly, both in the United States as well as in Europe, immigrants may variously be described as *migrants*, *immigrants*, *ethnic minorities*, in more formal discourse, and as foreigners (*Ausländer*, *buitenlanders*, *extracomunitari*, etc.), in less formal text and talk, depending on the country and the language. More typical of negative reporting is the lexical emphasis on breaking the law when words such as *illegals* are used. The British tabloid press is lexically most explicitly racist in describing poor immigrants or refugees as *scroungers*, and related negative words.

5.2.6 Quotations

News is largely produced on the basis of discourses by various sources, such as news actors, commentators, witnesses, or declarations and press releases of institutions. More or less explicitly, these sources may be directly or indirectly quoted – one of the ways the production of news is shown in the text. As may be expected on the basis of news production routines, elites tend to be quoted more than nonelites. Obviously the same applies to Our sources rather than Their sources – signaling not only which sources are more available or more sought after, but especially which sources are found to be more reliable. Thus, ethnic events are defined by Us, and seldom by Them. If Others are allowed to speak, they never speak alone – although that is quite common for Our own speakers. Besides the overall perspective of the report, such biased citation patterns further emphasize Our dominant definition of ethnic affairs.

6 Reception of Biased News

A multidisciplinary study of racism in the press is not limited to an inquiry into news production routines and news structures, but obviously also needs to examine the effects of such news on the public at large.

Though reception studies are notoriously difficult, if not problematic, and typically met with extensive debate in the field of journalism, current insights in cognitive and social psychology provide at least a basis for a more explicit approach to this issue. Thus, we generally know what

discourses and what properties of discourse tend to be understood and memorized best (Graber, 1988; Jensen, 1986; Larson, 1983).

One basic finding is that, all other things being equal, memory for discourse depends on the combined influences of text or talk itself, on the one hand, and on the properties (interest, knowledge, attitudes, aims, etc.) of the recipients, on the other. Indeed, the same news report may be read, understood, represented, and remembered differently by different readers. Roughly, those with more interest in, and knowledge about, immigration tend to remember stories better than others. Basic insights of cognitive and social psychology predict that readers with negative attitudes or racist ideologies will focus on, and better remember, negative aspects of stories on immigrants or minorities – thus finding confirmation of their own prejudices.

Yet, discourse processing and hence the production of the *mental models* in memory (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) that define our interpretation of news reports, are also influenced by the structure of the news reports themselves. This is especially the case for those readers who do not (yet) have strong attitudes or ideologies about minorities or immigrants.

It is at this point that the structures summarized above, overall tending to focus on negative attributes of the Others, may manipulate readers to construe “preferred readings,” that is, mental models of events that are rather in line with the discursively expressed intentions of the journalist.

Thus, negative overall topics, as expressed by biased headlines, will contribute to the construction of overall negative macrostructures controlling the lower-level microstructures of the mental model that represents people’s understanding of news reports. The same is true for the many types of local negative descriptions – which in their own way influence the local structures of the mental model.

For instance, the use of the ubiquitous metaphor of “waves” of immigrants does not merely signify that there are many immigrants, but at the same time activates generic knowledge about waves as large and threatening quantities of water in which “We” may drown. Since mental models are multimodal, such a metaphorical interpretation may thus feature fears of “drowning” in immigrants. Fieldwork among autochthonous people in Amsterdam, talking about “foreigners” in their neighborhood, shows that these are indeed the kinds of meanings associated with immigration as represented by the mass media.

6.1 From Mental Models to Socially Shared Attitudes and Ideologies

Finally, as explained above, racism is not a question of individual bias and bigotry. Despite significant individual variation, racism is a form of social domination of one group by another group – and needs to be described and explained at a collective, societal level.

Thus, whereas mental models are personal, ad hoc and contextual, and dependent on the specific interests, knowledge, opinions, and experiences (old models) of individual readers, readers tend to generalize their mental models and abstract more generic attitudes about immigrants and their properties. In-group members communicate with others on immigration in daily conversations, and may also read about the experiences (mental models) and attitudes of others in the press. It is in this way that ingroup members are “ethnically socialized,” by adopting (or sometimes opposing) dominant attitudes.

Given the ubiquitous influence of the mass media, including the press, in the field of stories on minorities and immigrants, their dominant discourses are more likely to influence mental models, and indirectly socially shared generic attitudes about the Others. This is especially the case when there are no other, competitive, different, public discourses about the Others, or when the personal experiences of readers are systematically inconsistent with media discourse.

It follows, then, that the dominant (negative) definition of minorities and immigrants in the press – as well as in politics, as represented in the press – most likely has a powerful influence on the formation and confirmation of public attitudes – and more fundamental ideologies – on immigration or ethnic affairs. It is in this way that public discourse, as social practice, not only itself may be a form of discrimination, but even more fundamentally plays a role in the reproduction of the system of racism, by discursively producing or reproducing ethnic prejudices, generalized and abstracted from negative mental models of ethnic events as described in news reports (Van Dijk, 1987).

Related Topics

7 Language Ideologies (Kroskrity); 14 Discursive Practices, Linguistic Repertoire, and Racial Identities (Baugh); 15 Language and Racialization (Chun, Lo); 24 Discrimination via Discourse (Wodak).

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