

UNIT 9

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY

As occasionally happens in intellectual matters, the concept *language ideology* named something that anthropologists, linguists, and other analysts of language had been aware of for some time: different values are placed on various aspects of language at different times and in different places. We see it as early as in Malinowski's "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," in much work on the ethnography of speaking [including in Joel Sherzer and Regna Darnell's "Outline Guide for the Ethnographic Study of Speech Use" (especially the section on "Attitudes Toward the Use of Speech")], and in a good portion of the work of Michael Silverstein. When Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin gave a name to this approach to the understanding of language in 1994, they unleashed a new creative energy in this study (see also Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998, Kroskrity 2000). The term *ideology* (in contrast to *idea*) links notions of power and politics to questions of how people regard the very nature of language.

Writing on language ideology is very broad and very rich. Elsewhere in this book we have also seen it applied to norms of socialization (Chapter 9), to attitudes toward literacy (Chapter 17), and to the meanings of the English word *like* (Chapter 39). The term is now used in studies of gender, multilingualism, language policy, language standardization, prejudice, language shift, language socialization, and many more topics.

Suggested Further Reading

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CHAPTER 46

Communication of Respect in Interethnic Service Encounters

Benjamin Bailey

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Linguistic differences can lead to social differences, which in turn can produce anything from indifference to violence. People often believe that others are disrespectful of them, when in fact there are different ideologies about the norms of interaction. Riots broke out in Los Angeles in the 1990s, as depicted fictionally in Spike Lee's film Do the Right Thing, in which Korean shopkeepers were often regarded as privileged outsiders by African Americans resentful of inequalities. In this article, Benjamin Bailey looks carefully at interactions between shopkeepers and their customers, revealing that something as subtle as whether a laugh is reciprocated can lead to conclusions about respect. The ideologies people hold, and enact, regarding the proper use of language is part and parcel of their view of proper human behavior. We tend to regard our ideologies as universal morality, but when one group's norms are contrasted with those of another, we can see how variable these guidelines are.

Reading Questions

- How did African Americans in Bailey's study regard Korean shopkeepers? How did Korean shopkeepers regard African American customers?
- How did African Americans and Koreans demonstrate respect? How did each group interpret the other group's interactional behavior?
- What are *involvement politeness* and *restraint politeness*? How do these relate to *socially minimal* and *socially expanded service encounters*?
- How do African Americans and Koreans interact among themselves? How does each group tend to regard exchanges at the stores?
- What are norms of affective personal involvement for African Americans, as displayed in Encounter 1? How would call-and-response work? What happens when people have different expectations about their interlocutors' responses? (Compare Tannen, Chapter 30.)
- What communicative activities with strangers are typical for African Americans? for Koreans? How does this norm play out in Encounter 2? Why do you think the storekeeper becomes more reticent while the customer becomes more animated at the end of the encounter?

Conflict in face-to-face interaction between immigrant Korean retail merchants and their African American customers has been widely documented since the early 1980s. Newspapers in New York, Washington, DC, Chicago, and Los Angeles have carried stories on this friction; and the 1989 movie *Do the Right Thing* depicted angry confrontations of this type. By the

time that the events of April 1992 – referred to variously as the Los Angeles "riots," "uprising," "civil disturbance" or, by many immigrant Koreans, *sa-i-gu* 'April 29' – cast a media spotlight on such relations, there had already been numerous African American boycotts of immigrant Korean businesses in New York and Los Angeles; politicians had publicly addressed the issue; and academics (e.g. Ella Stewart 1989 and Chang 1990) had begun to write about this type of friction.

There are multiple, intertwined reasons for these interethnic tensions in small businesses. An underlying source

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