

Ideology, language choice and language change

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The tradition of research on ideology and language assumes that ideology, related to ideas, beliefs and opinions, construes underlying patterns of meaning and the corresponding frames of interpretation. These have a bearing on different types of discourse (cf. e.g. Verschueren 2012). The research presented here adds to this by focusing on (a) ideological self-ascription, (b) choice of the intended addressees, and (c) language choice on three levels:

- the macro-level of the extended social group, usually with an intended ethnic, religious or political identity,
- the meso- level of ideological group differentiation within the frame provided by the macro-level, and
- the micro-level of the (Self or Other) ascription by an individual speaker.

The paper discusses these matters based on representative modern-era ideologically conditioned periods of change in Central Europe that systematically addressed ideological (initially religious, later national) issues through language. Firstly, the Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries addressed the transregional macrolevel and promoted spoken languages, for which an adequate choice of language norm was required. This brought about language-ideological considerations and caused significant language shifts mediated by codification.¹ Secondly, the emergence of national ideologies in the 19th century accompanied by a search for the language variety with sufficient cultural weight to represent the nation (such as the language of the 16th century Kralice Bible for Bohemia, or the language of the Baroque poetry of Dubrovnik for Croatia, influenced by the Catholic Counter-Reformation); the accompanying codification brought about major language shifts across the national territories. The third period of change started with the loss of the ideology of supra-national standard languages (particularly Serbo-Croatian, in part paralleled by CzechoSlovak) in Central Europe, which overtly preceded the loss of the political ideology of supranational states. Superficially seen this was a process opposite to the former ones (i.e. linguistic ideology change preceded the corresponding political change of ideology), but in fact the loss of the linguistic supra-national ideology was a proxy for the loss of the political supra-national ideology, officially forbidden by the ruling communist regimes.

These major periods of change were triggered by increase vs. decrease of the macro-level ideological scope (in the latter case, dissolution of the overarching language norm) leading to change implemented by codification.

The contemporary period is mainly characterized by meso-level ideological differentiations systematically expressed either by preserving linguistic conservatism or adopting innovation (i.e., either by rejecting or adopting the forms or orthographies proposed by recent language reforms).

Mass media choose these alternatives to implicitly advertise their political-ideological adherences. This is another example of language ideology as a proxy for political ideology attested both in contemporary Czech (Bermel 2007) and Croatian (Gvozdanović 2010, PetiStanić 2013). It is neither destandardization nor demotization (as defined by Kristiansen & Coupland 2011), but ideologically driven symbolic dissection on the meso-level within the macro-frame of the standard language.

Based on Croatian and Czech examples, this paper traces effects of an increase or decrease of ideological scope on the macro level, showing how changes of political, religious and national ideologies are interrelated with language ideologies that condition the corresponding language changes.

¹ E.g., for Croatian cf. the discussion by Knežević (2007), Gabrić-Bagarić (2010).

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