Ideology and Discourse

- **Defining ideology**
- The first assumption is that, whatever the ideologies are, they are primarily some kind of 'ideas', that is, **belief systems**.
- This implies, among other things, that ideologies, as such, do not contain the ideological practices or societal structures (e.g. religious organisations or political parties) that are based on them.
- It also implies that a theory of ideology needs a cognitive component that is able to properly account for the notions of `belief' and `belief system,' for instance as these are dealt with in contemporary cognitive science.

- **Secondly**, just as there are no private languages, there are no private, personal ideologies.
- Hence these belief systems are socially shared by the members of a collectivity of social actors.
- In other words, ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of a group, that is, its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction.
- Different types of ideologies are defined by the kind of groups that 'have' an ideology, such as
  - social movements,
  - political parties,
  - professions,
  - religious movements,
  - Social institutions, etc

- **Thirdly**, ideologies are not any kind of socially shared beliefs, they control and organize other socially shared beliefs.
- Thus, a racist ideology may control attitudes about immigration,
- a feminist ideology may control attitudes about abortion
- Hence, ideologies are foundational social beliefs of a rather general and abstract nature.
- One of their cognitive functions is to provide (ideological) coherence to the beliefs of a group and thus facilitate their acquisition and use in everyday situations.
- Among other things, ideologies also specify what general cultural values (freedom, equality, justice, etc.) are relevant for the group.

- **Fourthly**, as the sociocognitive foundation of social groups, ideologies are gradually acquired and (sometimes) changed through life or a life period, and hence need to be relatively stable.
- One does not become a pacifist, feminist, racist or socialist overnight, nor does one change one's basic ideological outlook in a few days.
- Many experiences and discourses are usually necessary to acquire or change ideologies.
- The often observed variability of ideological opinions of group members, thus, should be accounted for at the personal or contextual level, and is no ground to reject the notion of a shared, stable group ideology.

- **What ideologies are not**
- Ideologies are not personal beliefs of individual people;
  - they are not necessarily `negative' (there are racist as well as antiracist ideologies, communist and anticommunist ones);
  - they are not some kind of `false consciousness' (whatever that is exactly);
  - they are not necessarily dominant, but may also define resistance and opposition;
  - they are not the same as discourses or other social practices that express, reproduce or enact them;
  - and they are not the same as any other socially shared beliefs or belief systems.

- **The social functions of ideologies**
- Ideologieshave many cognitive and social functions.
- First of all, they organize and ground the social representations shared by the members of (ideological) groups.
- Secondly, they are the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of social groups as group members.
- Thirdly, they allow members to organize and coordinate their (joint) actions and interactions in view of the goals and interests of the group as a whole.
- Finally, they function as the part of the sociocognitive interface between social structures (conditions, etc.) of groups on the one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand

The Structure of Ideologies

- Another topic neglected in traditional ideology studies is their very structure.

- Thus, we may discuss ideologies of liberalism, socialism, or pacifism, among many others, but it is obviously crucial that their analysis requires an explicit description of their 'contents' and their internal organization.

- As yet, we have no general theory of this cognitive organization of ideologies. However, their social functions as representations of the goals and interests of social groups, as well as the analysis of ideological discourse, offers some suggestions for what may be called an ideology schema that organizes the beliefs of an ideology

- Such a schema may be seen as composed of the following fundamental categories:
- **Identity**: Who are we? Who belongs to us? Who is a member and who can join?
- **Activities**: What do we (have to) do? What is our role in society?
- **Goals**: What is the goal of our activities?
- **Norms and values**: What are the norms of our activities? What is good or bad for us?
- **Group relations**: Who are our friends and our enemies?
- **Resources**: What material or symbolic resources form the basis of our (lack of) power and our position in society?

- Th is very general schema organizes the fundamental beliefs of an ideological group and hence may also be seen as the structure of the overall self-image of the group as well as its relations to other groups.

- Generally—though not always—such a self-image of the ideological ingroup is positive, whereas that of outgroups is negative. Hence the typical polarized structure of ideologies as organized representations as **Us versus Them**.

- This polarized nature of ideologies is obviously more prominent for ideologies where the goals and interests of social groups are at stake, as is the case for neoliberal versus socialist, or between sexist and feminist ideologies, and possibly less so for ideologies that are less polarized, as is the case for ideologies shared by groups of professionals (such as professors or journalists).

- **Ideologies and Attitudes**
- The social and political functions of ideologies require these to be rather general and abstract.
- Thus, a feminist ideology needs to be applicable to any issue related to the position of women in society, such as their role as citizens, workers, mothers, and so on.
- Hence, a feminist ideology must consist of fundamental, value-based beliefs about gender equality and human rights.
- It therefore makes sense to further distinguish between general ideologies, on the one hand, and socially shared ideological attitudes , on the other hand.

- **Ideologies and Mental Models**
- We have seen that ideologies are assumed to be shared by members of groups.
- This also enables ideologies to be used and applied in the social practices in the everyday lives of these members.
- This means that the general beliefs of ideologies and the social attitudes based on them need to be made specific for the individual circumstances, characteristics, and experiences of individual members.
- That is, social cognition should be related to personal cognition, including personally variable opinions about social issues and social practices (such as, for instance, abortion, divorce, or immigration).

- Thus, each member of an ideological group may be a socialist, feminist, or pacifist in her or his own way—as we also see in the variable ideologically based discourses and social practices in empirical research.
- Since, moreover, individual people may be members of various ideological groups, their experiences (mental models) may feature—sometimes contradictory—personal opinions and other beliefs as influenced by different ideologies:
- One may be a feminist, socialist ecologist—even when in specific social situations one or more of these ideologies will be more relevant, and hence more influential, than the others.

Discourse and Ideology

- Ideological discourse usually exhibits the polarized structures of underlying attitudes and ideologies, that is, a structure that typically emphasizes positive properties of Us, the ingroup, and negative properties of Them, the outgroup.

- Such polarization may affect all levels of discourse, from the surface levels of sounds and visual structures, syntax, and the lexicon, on the one hand, to the underlying semantic and pragmatic levels of meaning and action, as well as the dimensions that cut through different levels, as is the case for the rhetoric of sound (e.g, alliterations) and meaning (as in hyperboles, euphemisms, or metaphors), on the other hand.

Ideological Discourse Semantics

- **Topics**
- As is the case for many phenomena, discourse may be analysed at a more global and a more local level. The same is true for discourse meaning. Thus we distinguish between (local) meanings of words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, on the one hand, and overall, global meanings of whole discourses, on the other hand.
- The latter are described in terms of macro-propositions , which may be seen as overall conceptual summaries of (larger parts) of a discourse, and are commonly described as (discourse) topics.
- These topics are typically expressed in headlines, abstracts, and summaries.
- In other words, for a discourse to be globally coherent, local propositions always need to be related to a higher level topic.

- The choice of topics of discourse may be biased by underlying attitudes and ideologies
- In the usual polarized structure of ideological discourse, we may expect largely negative topics about Them, and neutral or positive topics about Us.
- Negative topics about Us (such as our racism and prejudice) are typically mitigated or ignored, and hence seldom reach (important) topic status.
- The same is true for positive information about Them

- **Propositions**
- Traditionally, meanings are represented as propositions, consisting of a predicate, some arguments, and modalities such as 'It is necessary that . . .'.
- First of all, in ideological discourse, as we also have seen for topics (macro-propositions), negative meanings about outgroups may be emphasized, and such will also be obvious in the predicates of local propositions.

- **Modalities**
- Propositions may be modalized in many ways. Facts may be presented as possible, probable, or necessary; as obligatory or permitted; as desired or hoped for; and so on.
- Obviously such epistemic, deontic, or other modalities may also be controlled by underlying attitudes and ideologies.
- See also the evaluative modalities 'It is wrong that' and 'should bear' in the following example, which also presuppose underlying ideological attitudes, not only about refugees, but also about paying taxes.
  - It is wrong that ratepayers in the London area should bear an undue proportion of the burden of expenditure that those people are causing.

- **Local coherence**
- At the semantic level of meaning, text and talk consist of sequences of propositions that also need to be locally coherent, from one to the next.
- Such coherence may be referential (when the facts referred to are related, for instance by a relation of cause and consequence) or functional (when one proposition has a special function with respect to another one, as is the case for a Generalization, Specification, Explanation, or Example).
- Thus, people of one group may see some event as a cause when others do not see a cause at all, or maybe even see just a consequence.

- **Actor descriptions**
- People can be described or identified in many ways, for instance by their first or last name, as individual persons or as members of groups or categories, as well as with many possibly explicit or implicit attributes.
- In ideological discourse in which ingroup and outgroups are quite explicit, outgroups are typically identified and described in negative w

- **Disclaimers**
- Ideological talk in general, and racist discourse in particular, is replete with various types of disclaimers.
- Classic examples are such disclaimers such as 'I have nothing against blacks (immigrants, etc.), but . . .' Such disclaimers have a first part emphasizing a positive characteristic of the speaker or the ingroup, and a second, contrasted part, typically introduced by but , in which the speaker says something negative about the outgroup.

- **Metaphor**
- Conceptual metaphors are also powerful semantic means to bias text and talk ideologically.
- Although deeply embedded in culture and the basis of multimodally based cognition, metaphors relate abstract notions to concrete experiences of people.
- In such cases, negative or positive feelings and opinions may be emphasized.
  - For instance, the classic example of media discourse on immigration is in terms of waves of people, that is, as threatening amounts of water, in which one may drown—a sensation that has important emotional consequences and hence may seriously influence understanding, recall and general ideological learning from discourse.

- **To conclude,** ideologies form the shared sociocognitive foundations of social groups and their social practices.
- They are organized by schemas consisting of fundamental categories for the existence and reproduction of social groups, such as their identity, activities, goals, norms and values, reference groups, and resources.
- Their contents are oft en polarized by positive properties attributed to the ingroup and negative ones to the outgroup.
- Ideologies control and are formed by more specific socially shared attitudes about social issues that are relevant for the group and its reproduction.
- These attitudes in turn control the personal mental models group members form about specific events and actions, whereas these mental models again control actual social practices, such as the production and comprehension of discourse.

- Conversely, therefore, ideologies are generally acquired by text, talk, and other forms of communication.
- Special ideological structures of discourse facilitate this formation of ideological models, attitudes, and ideologies.
- Given the polarized nature of underlying ideologies, attitudes, and mental models, ideological discourse too tends to be organized by such polarization.
- Thus, in text and talk negative properties of outgroups and positive ones of ingroups tend to be emphasized and, conversely, Our negative properties and Their positive ones tend to be ignored, suppressed, or mitigated.

- This general ideological strategy takes place at all levels of discourse, such as
  - the selection of main topics,
  - local coherence, implications, descriptions,
  - lexical choice, as well as syntactic structures (active versus passive, nominalizations)
  - and overall ordering,
  - backgrounding, and foregrounding of information.
- In addition, conventional discourse formats, such as those of narration and argumentation may thus be transformed so as to emphasize or de-emphasize information or arguments.