

## Chapter 2

# Ideology as Social Imagination: Linguistic Strategies for a Cultural Approach to Controversial Social Situations

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### ABSTRACT

*Ideology is a social imagination of world's truth that can be shaped and eventually corrected before it becomes historically dangerous. The methodology of linguistic analysis offers the essential approach to a positive resolution of this problem because it suggests how to prevent risky ideologies, or how to change them once they are established. The suggested linguistic strategies refer, particularly, to the textual analysis of meaning as the key to discover the imaginative value of words in a culture from which the people's mentality derives. Cultural interventions in this field of social life are, obviously, very important to foster mutual understanding, welfare, and world peace.*

### INTRODUCTION

*Ideology* is a word derived from the ancient Greek ἰδεῖν (*idèin*) whose meaning is “to see”, and λογία (*loghìa*), whose meaning, broadly, is “science” (Beekes, 2010). Ideology is, therefore, the “science of vision” and belongs to the imaginative process, which is a structural feature of the human mind and its behaviour. Its domain is the individual sphere and the social environment. In the individual sphere, the ideology is called mentality, and depends on the dynamics of human knowledge of the world

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and on their preservation and transmission. Indeed, the human experience of the world is allowed by the perception of material things and the conceptualization of this perception. Through senses we perceive the experienced reality, and through concepts we know such reality. Therefore, knowledge of reality depends on conceptualization and its quality.

## **IDEAS AND WORDS**

Conceptualization is a metaphorical process (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A thing becomes something else without changing its real dimension, but simply transforming the kind of access to itself, which is offered. Particularly, concepts become words, which allow to easily preserve and transmit the known reality, delivering it to the lightness of the phonemes: linguistic sounds easy to be stored in memory and kept always available when needed. A world without words is heavy, like the one that Gulliver meets in his travels in remote nations (Swift, 1726)<sup>1</sup>. Instead, words are the intellectual key that opens the mental file containing the images of the things to which meanings give linguistic resolution, through an equally metaphorical process: phonemes become meanings, which, in turn, become ideas while remaining sounds (Torricelli, 2006).

The process is arbitrary with regard to the results. Nothing, in the existing natural world, links necessarily those sounds with those ideas and vice versa (Saussure, 1921). *Black* is a colour name whose phonemes [b], [l], [æ] and [k] do not have any trace of the chromaticism expressed by the word *black*, so that *white* could equally express the same idea, if the linguistic code was unanimously reversed by speakers. Only the metaphorical value given by the human society to words makes the relation between sounds and meanings essential from a linguistic point of view, warranting its semantic authenticity for the intelligence of the world (Sljusareva, 1980). So, *Black* is equal to the natural black only because English language considers this kind of phonological translation a suitable linguistic metaphor of the known natural reality, and gives it this cognitive value in the imagination of the world culturally shared by its own speakers.

Values, therefore, are imaginative entities, existing only in people's mind (Modell, 2006). But, for this reason, they are the parameters of human reasoning and judging about the world, which every historical culture uses.

Consequently, they govern the social imagination of the world to which each culture gives voice through its words. And words become the essential key to understand this mental process, culturally internalized in what is called intelligence of things, and to be aware of its effects on our life.

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