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Introduction: Regimes of Language and the Social, Hierarchized Organization of Ideologies

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Abstract

This introduction seeks to problematize the notion of regimes of language with respect to how the term regimentation is used in the other social sciences, and with respect to language ideologies. It argues that regimentation, a term possibly more useful than regimes, strengthens the position already developed in semiotic anthropology that ideologies are not mere ideas but should also encompass social action, by focusing not only on ‘the rules of the [linguistic] game’ but also the strategies that guide social action.

Keywords

Regimes of language, Language ideologies, Standardization, Power

1. Introduction

Through several empirical studies, this special issue seeks to question the theoretical relevance of the notion of regimes of language, or linguistic regimes, a notion widely used in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology but rarely problematized. To put it simply, the contributors to this issue ask what it means to talk about linguistic regimes, what it means for instance to say that standardization is only one linguistic regime among others (Gal, 2006, p. 17), and how, if at all, this differs from other approaches, in particular in terms of ideologies of language. The reason why questioning the notion of linguistic regimes is important is of course the widespread usage of the term, but it lies also in what problematizing this notion allows us to say about language ideological work, as linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists.

This collection grew from a panel that Janet Connor and I organised at the American Anthropological Association Congress in 2015 in Denver. The panel’s main hypothesis was that ‘regimes,’ an increasingly ubiquitous notion in linguistic anthropology, were just another way of talking about ideologies, which in turn suggested that this latter term was perhaps somewhat overused. ‘Language ideologies’ have indeed tended, for the past fifteen years at least, to become hegemonic as an analytical lens in such academic disciplines as linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, or applied linguistics. In those disciplines, this approach is usually traced back to Silverstein (1979), later to be reinforced by works on language and political economy (Gal, 1989; Irvine, 1989), or by a number of seminal volumes on that theme (e.g. Schieffelin et al., 1998). But perhaps its increased usage has diluted the strength of the term and the success of this notion might thus be its main weakness: everything can now be a language ideology, the term often being used as another way of saying ‘idea about language.’ To quote Marshall Sahlins, ‘[i]n the social sciences, paradigms are not outmoded

because they explain less and less, but rather because they explain more and more—until, all too soon, they are explaining just about everything’ (2002, p. 74). This might currently be the stage reached by the notion of language ideologies.

2. Regimes as the practice of power

What, then, are regimes? Before looking into how the notion has been used in linguistic anthropology, we ask briefly how it is used in other branches of the social sciences in order to assess the pertinence of its usage. The cognate term ‘regimenting’ has long been used in anthropology and sociology, as a brief search through the archives of *Anthrosource* quickly shows. For instance, in a paper in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* entitled ‘Anthropology and Heritage Regimes’ (Geismar, 2015), the author used the term ‘regime’ to speak simultaneously of discourses, practices, ideologies, governance, politics and knowledge. She refers to what she calls a classical definition according to which regimes are ‘a set of rules and norms regulating the relations between a state-government and society’ (Bendix et al., 2012, p. 12). ‘Regimes’ is also a term much favoured in Latour’s brand of science and technology studies (STS). Latour talks of regimes of enunciation, for instance, when referring to sentences produced in different contexts but with ‘the same spirit’ (Latour, 2005, p. 32). In other texts he talks of climatic regimes (Latour, 2015) or of regimes of truth (Latour, 2012) — his *Enquiry into Modes of Existence* identifies fifteen distinct regimes of truth, but it is worth noting that the term *regime* does not feature in the online glossary that accompanies the book. Regimes of truth are likely a borrowing from Foucault (1980), who approaches such regimes as ‘types of discourses a society accepts and makes function as true’ (Weir, 2008, p. 368; see also Etrillard, this issue, and Irvine, this issue).

In his historiographical work, Hartog refers to regimes of historicity to analyse how people link past, present and future at certain moments in time—how people conceptualize time (Hartog, 2015). In an interview volume (Hartog, 2013), Hartog justifies the use of the term through its polysemy, referring to its use as both a medical term (*régime* in French, i.e. regimen in English), which relates to how one leads one’s life, and as a political term (political regimes, or systems of government or governance). In both cases, Hartog argues, a regime indexes the combination of different levels or different layers — regimes are thus inherently composite, combinations of different elements that lend coherence to a whole.

Yet, regimes are also, and perhaps mainly, ways of describing not only effects, but also practices of power. Following Benveniste (1973), the practice of power is comprised in the very etymology of the term, stemming from the root that also gave the Latin word *rex* (king). Regimes are thus semantically linked with terms such as reign or region, terms whose etymology seems to connect them with the right to trace lines, i.e. to separate, to draw lines between an inside and an outside:

Regere fines means literally ‘trace out the limits by straight lines.’ This is the operation carried out by the high priest before a temple or a town is built, and it consists in the delimitation on a given terrain of a sacred plot of ground. The magical character of this operation is evident: what is involved is the delimitation of the interior and the exterior, the realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane, the national territory and foreign territory. The tracing of these limits is carried out by the person invested with the highest powers, the *rex*. (Benveniste, 1973, p. 312)

A regime, then, can be understood as a spatial and temporal set of practices, either physical or symbolic, through which rules are established to determine an inside and an outside, and in which not anyone is allowed to participate or seen as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991). Ideas of kingship relate to ideas of sovereignty, and to *loci* and individuals wherein it rests. In this respect, while ideologies also relate to the divisions within societies (Halpern,

1961) and to the narratives that legitimise such practices, regimes appear to encompass practices themselves. They allow the description of how power is organised and distributed within a group, and how this is ultimately part of how a group views itself — what is its inside and its outside, and the rules that form the symbolic (i.e. conventional) lines that compose it.

3. Regimenting language: beyond ideology?

In order to understand whether ‘regimes’ are in fact mere placeholders for something else, or whether they serve a genuine purpose, a slight detour via ‘language ideologies’ is required since both terms seem to be taken to have close meanings, for example by contributors to the *Regimes of Language* (Kroskrity, 2000b) volume. The drawing of lines is of course essential to the discipline of linguistics, which has long used such lines as heteroglosses to separate one language from the next, sometimes clashing with how the speakers of a linguistically identified language viewed the boundaries of their linguistic practices (see Bert and Costa, 2014). In that sense, the study of the drawing of those lines, and of their consequences, is essential to an anthropological approach to language. Is this, however, what regimes of language are about? Are they in actual fact not a mere synonym for language ideologies, a concept that, as stated above, has become so ubiquitous as to become perhaps meaningless?

Taken as explicative variables, ideologies are more often than not analysed as post-hoc rationalisations and explanations of why people think one thing or another, and too often ideologies are analysed in and for themselves. Thus in many cases, studies in terms of language ideologies have not escaped the caveat identified by Charles Briggs in the 1992 special issue of *Pragmatics*:

Ideology tends to conjure up the notion of a rather fixed, abstracted, and circumscribed set of beliefs. It also seems to imply some distance from social action and particularly from the constitution of ideologies in action. If ‘linguistic ideologies’ are accordingly relegated to either a bounded ‘conceptual domain’ or are cast as an additional level of linguistic patterning, researchers will encounter more difficulty in connecting work in this area with questions of history, social relations, and power. [...] we might be well advised to follow Foucault in adopting the term ‘strategies’ in lieu of ‘ideologies.’ (Briggs, 1992, p. 400)

Ideologies, as Judith Irvine (2011) points out, are above all *ideas*. Yet a focus on underlying ideas, or a system of ideas, entails a risk of falling into the structuralist bias of insisting on *structure* rather than on *events*, or of explaining events through a reference to ideas as overarching or underlying structures, reducing analysis to the debunking of such ideas (Latour, 2004).

By contrast, and by emphasising action, a focus on regimentation can perhaps be understood as a way to bring both action and ideas-as-action together, while also integrating the ways in which language and discourse are constructed as unequally distributed resources. In linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, regimes have come to be used in a number of ways — the most famous reference likely being the 2000 volume edited by Paul Kroskrity and entitled *Regimes of Language* (Kroskrity, 2000b). This is an essential book in many respects, one which draws on and continues the disciplinary conversation on language ideologies, but with reference to regimentation it is in fact of little help. The term regime is not used very much at all in the book, and in his introduction Kroskrity defines it with reference to political domination and to Gramscian hegemony. ‘Regimes of language,’ Kroskrity writes, was a way of bringing together issues of language and politics (Kroskrity, 2000a). While also relating regimentation with control over the production and reception of dominant discourses, the book itself is mostly about language ideologies, and regimes seem

to refer overall to the general ordering of ideologies and to their circulation. Whatever the original aim of the volume, the expression ‘regimes of language’ has stuck and has come to refer to an overarching form of control, of organisation of practices, a meaning which Mitchell (this volume) takes up and expands, showing its pertinence in the case of the Telugu Spoken language movement in early 20th century India.

It is worth mentioning two further bodies of work in which the term ‘regimes of language’ is used, in order to exclude the first one and to follow up on the second for the purpose of this volume. First, let us consider the work of the German sociolinguist Florian Coulmas who, although he also refers to the 2000 *Regimes of Language* volume, has developed his own interpretation of the notion. For him, regimes are a way to talk about ‘administered language,’ as he writes:

A language regime can be described as a set of constraints on individual language choices. As I understand the term, it consists of habits, legal provisions, and ideologies. (Coulmas, 2005, p. 7)

For Coulmas however, the use of the term regimes is a tool for comparing different types of language policies, echoing one of the meanings Hartog ascribes to regimes, i.e. political regimes. I leave this aside for it focuses entirely on institutional language policy, whereas the approach adopted by contributors to this special issue and derived from linguistic anthropology considers a more diffuse model of power, closer to a Foucauldian perspective.

The second body of work relevant to a discussion of language regimes draws on several seminal texts in semiotic anthropology published by Michael Silverstein and Richard Parmentier in the 1980s, and more recently by Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine (see Irvine, this issue). Drawing on Silverstein, Parmentier defines regimentation as

the semiotic process of stipulating, controlling, or defining the contextual, indexical, or pragmatic dimension of sign function in 'discursive texts' by means of the construction of a relatively fixed or coherent 'interactional text.' (Parmentier, 1994, p. 127)

Regimentation, Parmentier continues, is put into effect through the use of such instruments as ‘textual forms, visual images, behavioural rules, consumption goods, ritual processions, architectural monuments, and museum exhibitions’ (Parmentier, 1994, p. 135) — in other words, material forms and practices rather than just ideas.

Susan Gal doesn’t explicitly define regimes, but refers to the term in at least two papers, in particular with reference to language standardization: ‘standardisation is only one kind of language regime’ (Gal, 2006, p. 17). One may thus ask what forms of practices, and not just ideas, does such a regime entail, and how is it sustained, not only through policies but through the everyday conduct of our own conducts, to paraphrase Foucault (2000) on governmentality? Does it merely signal a type of organisation where an ideology of standard language is prevalent? Gal had previously proposed that:

[a] Peircean approach also suggests that we can understand ‘ideologies’ as metadiscourses that comment on and regiment other communicative practices. Only when a practice is labelled and named is it regimented referentially, thereby becoming relatively easy to discuss as a social reality. (Gal, 2002)

In other words, and in line with the aim stated in semiotic anthropology from the end of the 1970s onward (see Mertz, 1985) to bring together social action and ideologies, Gal here connects the realms of ideas and actions. She suggest that language ideologies are social forces, that they make us *do* language, *do things* with language, and *regulate* or *organize* our everyday actions. If we are to follow the works cited above, regimes are not merely synonymous with ideologies but instead question the organization and implementation of ideologies: how, in other words, they are connected to action—a point which is taken further by all the contributions in this issue.

The questions we pose here require that we ask why language ideologies have become such a powerful lens of analysis, and what as tools they permit but also preclude. To echo Charles Briggs, the question of regimentation can very much be framed in Foucauldian terms, in the sense that regimes introduce a focus on power, or on the microphysics of power, that is to say on how through our daily deeds we direct the conduct of our own conduct. Regimes are about the daily reproduction of a moral order, i.e. the rights and obligations we accept as regulating interpersonal relations (Taylor, 2004), together with the social hierarchies that give those relations shape and meaning.

Regimes, in that sense, exist only through the continuous process of regimentation: they are the continuous production of particular social orders through everyday actions, acting through the continuous reproduction of naturalising or contesting ideologies, and drawing on as well as defining what counts as a resource. Regimentation is a convenient term, in other words, to bring together through a focus on social action the study of actions, ideologies and political economy.

To study the regimentation of language is then perhaps, to paraphrase the British anthropologist John Arundel Barnes and to echo the quotation by Briggs above, to watch language in action as well as the tactics and strategies that guide actions, not merely to study the rules of the game (Barnes, 1980, p. 301).

4. Outline of this issue

All papers explicitly address issues of regimentation, although no prior definition was given to the authors, thus letting each contributor decide on how the notion is or can be made relevant to them.

The first paper, by Janet Connor, addresses regimes of hearing as a way to understand how the ordering of auditory perception in a Norwegian classroom contributes to stratifying sameness and otherness in Norwegian society. Connor focuses on the microphysics of power to show how ideologies of sound are put into practice, and how this classifies children with immigrant backgrounds through presuppositions of what language should sound like. Connor shows how quiet is thought of as a defining feature of Norwegianness, and as an implicit way to produce exclusion in Norway.

Aude Etrillard then proposes to address the issue of language regimes through a study of British expats in Brittany (France). Her ethnographic study in the region reveals that the British benefit from positive attitudes towards their language, opening opportunities for them to access resources in English such as advanced administrative help or health care. The use of a foreign language in the French administrative system is a rare exception to the local monolingual ideology, an exception that Etrillard questions in her paper. According to her, English owes this specific place in the local regime of language not only to its supranational status, but also to the mobilization and articulation of whiteness and class categorizations by migrants and the local population. Her paper argues that white privilege is built on the sharing of ideological lines concerning language, 'integration' and otherness, which enables paradoxical rearrangements of the local language regime.

In the next paper, Sara Brennan and Bernadette O'Rourke ask how the Irish government has mobilised both ideologies of anonymity and authenticity to regiment the use of Irish throughout the Republic of Ireland. This regimentation, they argue, has resulted in expectations throughout the country as to how native speakers in the Gaeltacht (a series of regions mostly located in the West of Ireland that came to be viewed as repositories of the language as well as of authentic Ireland) are expected not only to speak but also to live and act. O'Rourke and Brennan thus develop the idea proposed above that regimentation, and

regimes of language are about governmentality in a Foucauldian sense, concerning the management of individuals' rights and obligations.

Alexandra Jaffe also questions what it means to live in a standard language regime but in a bilingual context (in Corsica), where French is now dominant, and where the Corsican standard is polynomic. She thus asks what it means to live at the intersection of several language regimes, and ultimately what a regime of standard language might mean for individuals when standardization itself means different things: the Corsican standard was contrived on bases that explicitly counter the ones on which the French standard is based, and yet the education model in France generates certain expectations as to what standard (and legitimate) language should be.

Taking a historical perspective and examining the shift that took place in the Telugu language regime in early 20th century India, Lisa Mitchell provides an analysis of how the Telugu Spoken language movement placed new expectations on speech and written language alike. She questions the connection between this shift and a shift in communicative regimes that privileged the voice of individuals over 'collective, corporeal forms of communication' which had hitherto been used by less privileged parts of the population. Mitchell views regimes as systematic structures that 'maintain or extend control or domination,' and like Jaffe is interested in the intersection of two conflicting linguistic regimes.

Finally, Judy Irvine comments on the papers in this issue, emphasizing the semiotic processes at work in the regimentation of language, and highlighting how regimentation is linked to practices, ones that work by 'organizing something, reducing variation, and excluding what doesn't fit.'

Taken altogether, the various contributions in this special issue bring together a Foucauldian approach in terms of practices of power and a semiotic approach to anthropology that also emphasizes ideologies of language as practices, certainly contributing to clarifying the use of the term 'regimes of language.' It is our hope that this special issue will make this notion more useful to anthropological work on language.

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