



# Towards a typology of discourse-based approaches to language attitudes<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews discourse-based approaches to language attitudes in terms of their contributions to understanding the creation of socio-indexical meaning in metalinguistic discourse. It proposes a five-level typology of approaches which includes topic-oriented, linguistic, cognitive, interactional, and rhetorical analyses. The article discusses the ways in which different types of analyses expose various aspects of social-semiotic and meta-semiotic processes involved in constructions of sociolinguistic indexical relations in the local interactional and larger contextual frames. The paper argues in favor of integrated discourse-based approaches and illustrates the potential of a rhetorical approach to serve as a unifying framework for blending analytical levels.

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## 1. Introduction

Discourse-based approaches to language attitudes, beliefs and ideologies have recently gained wider recognition as methods of research which can usefully complement the experimental paradigms traditionally used in sociolinguistics and social psychology of language (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Garrett, 2010; Johnstone, 2010; Preston, 2010). This methodological development is related to a number of theoretical considerations, including the following concerns about the limitations of experimental techniques in studying language attitudes:

- the narrow conception of social meaning underlying experimental language attitude research which does not reflect the complexity of social interpretation (Coupland, 2007; Potter and Wetherell, 1987);
- the conception of attitudes as static and decontextualized constructs (Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; Soukup, 2012);
- the essentialist nature of links between social categories, speakers, and language use underlying some of the quantitative approaches (Coupland, 2007; Garrett et al., 2003).

As a result of recent theoretical developments, the construct “language attitudes” has been reconceptualized in several ways, and the scope of language attitude research has expanded to include much more than the traditional focus on enduring evaluative reactions. For example, in the folk linguistic tradition of research, language attitudes have been viewed as part of larger concepts of “folk theories of language” (Niedzielski and Preston, 2003) and “language regard” (Preston, 2010). Other

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approaches (e.g., Hall-Lew and Stephens, 2012; Johnstone et al., 2006; Soukup, 2012) were influenced by a theoretical shift towards a sociocultural orientation in identity and language variation studies (see Bucholtz and Hall, 2008; Eckert, 2012; van Compernelle, 2011; Woolard, 2008 for discussion). As a result of this theoretical reorientation, language attitudes and ideologies have been seen as part of reflexive meaning-making processes of social semiosis (Agha, 2005; Irvine and Gal, 2009) and theorized in terms of language users' metapragmatic activity of indexicality (Silverstein, 1993, 2003; Eckert, 2008) which involves the creation of indexical relations between linguistic and social phenomena at different levels of metalinguistic awareness (Silverstein, 2003).

One of the methodological problems in discursual studies of language attitudes lies in finding theoretically-informed discourse-analytical approaches that would allow the researcher to provide an account of how the relations created at different levels of discourse function as part of a coherent construction of sociolinguistic indexicality. This paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of the abovementioned methodological problem by comparing different discursual approaches to the study of language attitudes in terms of their potential to reveal various aspects of sociolinguistic meaning-making in discourse. It revises a previous classification of such approaches in Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) which includes three levels of analysis: content-based, turn-internal pragmatic and semantic, and interactional. This article argues for finer distinctions between levels of analysis and expands the typology to include the following five levels: topic-oriented, linguistic, cognitive, interactional and rhetorical. By means of a methodological review, this paper argues that different levels of analysis may highlight various facets of discursively-constructed language attitudes and beliefs which may lead researchers to provide different accounts of language users' perceptions and belief systems. Distinguishing different levels of analysis and comparing their relevant advantages and limitations may help develop ways of integrating analytical techniques into methodologies which would serve to provide multifaceted accounts of complex language-attitudinal constructions in discourse.

This article discusses previously proposed approaches in terms of the following analytical strategies:

- micro-level interpretations of locally-situated communicative events and their linkage to macro-level analyses of ideological and socio-historical processes,
- analytical attention to different planes of discourse,
- attention to explicit vs. implicit modes of meaning-making in discourse,
- attention to different types of semiotic resources used by participants in constructing sociolinguistic indexical relations.

Theoretically, differential use and combination of such analytical strategies in language-attitude research may be seen as related to the differences in defining the locus of attitudinal and belief constructs, i.e., whether such constructs are primarily viewed (1) as structures emerging and developing within local interactional contexts (e.g., Potter and Wetherell, 1987), (2) as part of linguistic ideologies shared in a community of speakers (e.g., Irvine and Gal, 2009), or (3) as a complex intersection of locally-situated and socially-widespread meanings of language variation (e.g., Johnstone et al., 2006). Variable use of discourse-analytical strategies is also pertinent to a theoretical and methodological problem of making inferential links between the micro-level analysis of metapragmatic awareness observed in locally-situated interactions and macro-level representations of language ideology construction at communal, regional or national levels. The problem lies in having a theoretical and methodological justification for making such inferential links, and analyses at different levels of discourse provide various possibilities for linking larger ideological constructs to the contexts of situated interaction and local discourses.

The amount of analytical attention given to different planes of discourse is the basis for a classification of discursual approaches to language attitudes proposed in this paper. Planes of discourse are distinguished here using Schiffrin's (1987) model of discourse coherence which includes five interrelated pragmatic, semantic and cognitive planes. The pragmatic structures include a "participation framework," an "action structure," and an "exchange structure." The semantic plane is represented by an "ideational structure," and the cognitive component includes an "information state." Differences in attending to discourse structures may result in different accounts of the resources that participants use in explicit or implicit constructions of sociolinguistic indexical relations. In particular, depending on the level of analysis, the same discursual data may be interpreted as revealing different ways of construing language-ideological relations through participants' use of ideational, linguistic, cognitive, interactional, or rhetorical resources. The overall significance of interpretations and conclusions resulting from different analytical approaches to language attitudes lies in their contributions to understanding the social meanings of linguistic variables. They are also important for further development of theorization about the nature and role of metasemiosis (Silverstein, 1993, 2003) which is potentially a useful step in explaining the processes of language variation and change (Weinreich et al., 1968).

The studies discussed in this review deal with written and spoken metalinguistic discourse. The analytical foci of the studies surveyed are grouped on such evidence as samples of data analysis and presentation of results, rather than researchers' own claims as to the type of the methodology used. One of the reasons for this classificatory approach is that claims about the method of data analysis used in the studies are often not supported by the details in the Methodology section explaining the specifics of how discourse-analytical procedures were applied to the data. Another problem is that the same labels, for example, "content-oriented discourse analysis" in Preston (1994) and Hall-Lew and Stephens (2012) have been used to refer to quite different analytical techniques that reveal different aspects of attitude construction.

This discussion is not meant to be a criticism of the approaches that do not attend to all planes of discourse, since such approaches may serve their purpose in specific research contexts. Rather, it is aimed at highlighting the potential that

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