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Media Ideologies: An Introduction

When I interview people about their uses of new media, I am always surprised. I have been interviewing people at my home institution, Indiana University, for a few years now about how they use new media to end relationships. In every other bout of fieldwork, I started to become a little bored after 30 or 40 interviews. People's stories about marriage or government bureaucracy would begin to become predictable, I could anticipate how events would unfold in a narrative and often how people would interpret these events. Not so with my new media interviews. A moment typical only in its unexpectedness: Nicole told me that while she had started flirting with several men after her divorce, none of the flirtations had become serious—they weren't yet at the stage of texting each other. They were sending e-mails to each other, and, with one man, she was now chatting on the phone. But texting for her would mark a whole new stage of intimacy, and she wasn't there yet with anyone. Once again, I was taken aback. No one else I interviewed had considered phone calls less intimate than text messages. Nicole's assumptions about media determined how casual, familiar, and acceptable she would find any medium when used for a specific communicative task, in this case flirting. In my interviews, her hierarchy of media intimacy was not widely shared. People's range of beliefs about media kept surprising me, the sheer quantity of new technological options seems to encourage people to be complexly aware of the channels they could use. I found myself returning over and over again to linguistic anthropologists' work on language ideologies to understand how multiple, partial, strategic, and locatable the ideologies about media I kept encountering were. I also started to label these beliefs "media ideologies" as I used Atlas.ti to code my transcripts. And I wondered if other ethnographers studying media were finding the work of linguistic anthropologists as helpful as I have been.

This volume began with the question: what analytical possibilities can scholarly work on language ideologies offer the study of media? Studying media ideologies is not new, but calling the metalanguage that emphasizes the technology or bodies through which we communicate a "media ideology" is. By examining media ideologies, the authors in this volume are building on previous ethnographies of how people on the ground understand the ways the medium shapes the message (see e.g., Barker 2008; Schieffelin 2000; Spitulnik 1998/1999). *Media ideologies* as a term can sharpen a focus on how people understand both the communicative possibilities and the material limitations of a specific channel, and how they conceive of channels in general. In the scholarly literature (and in this introduction), media itself is a shifter. Sometimes it refers to the material forms people use to communication, from bodies, phonographs, to smartphones (see Kittler 1997). *Media* can also refer to the channel of communication, a familiar definition for readers of Dell Hymes' reformulation of Roman Jakobson's work (1989). Finally, *media* also can refer to codes, to semiotic systems of signification.¹ In this volume, the authors move between these definitions, depending on what is warranted by the ethnographic material and the direction of their analysis. Media ideologies weave

together under one rubric scholarly attention to how people understand a channel's impact on the creation of authorship, remediation, entextualization, knowledge storage, referentiality, address, and publics. Just as the explicitness of the term *language ideologies* brought together preexisting strands of analysis into productive configurations (Woolard 1998:4), so too the authors here hope the explicit focus offered by the term *media ideologies* can unite the shared concerns of media scholars and linguistic anthropologists.

Both media ideologies and language ideologies are, of course, part of a broader focus on semiotic ideologies (Keane 2003).² Indeed, this issue's emphasis on the materiality of media is prefigured by Keane's persuasive arguments that attention to semiotic ideologies also involves attention to the materiality of the sign. Why then devote ink and paper to distinguishing a subset of semiotic ideologies as media ideologies when semiotic ideologies encompass media ideologies? The answer is threefold. First, the term *media ideologies* allows scholars to be more precise about the intersection of different scholarly concerns they wish to address, an intersection already replete with questions raised by historians of media, film scholars, television scholars, scholars of new media, and media ethnographers. Here the authors are building upon an influential body of work in the anthropology of media that presented itself as new a few years ago (see Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, 2002), at the same time as they engage with linguistic anthropology in their media ethnographies. Second, discussing media ideologies in conjunction with language ideologies can raise productive questions about how media ideologies and language ideologies intertwine. While media ideologies and language ideologies may mutually constitute each other, they do not always easily align with one another—this depends on the ethnographic context. As the authors show, when language ideologies and media ideologies do align, they often generate or support locally persuasive perspectives on what selves and social interactions should be. Third, *media ideologies* as a term draws attention to semiotic ideologies of voice, body, image, and sound, encouraging analyses of how both language and technologies of communication are understood to mediate these.³

As ideologies, both language ideologies and media ideologies are multiple, locatable, partial, positioned, and contested (see Kroskrity 2000). They are reflections of people's strategies at the same time as the ideologies feed into these strategies, political in the broadest sense of the term. Yet the material structure of communicative technologies requires scholars of media ideologies to pay attention to a range of concerns that are not so pressing for scholars of language ideologies. In this introduction, I first discuss briefly how earlier work on language ideologies has influenced the authors. Second, I address the role the materiality of media plays in distinguishing studies of media ideologies from language ideologies. Lastly, I point to four other themes raised when examining how language ideologies and media ideologies mutually constitute each other: remediation, referentiality, address, and newness.

Even as linguistic anthropologists have carved out a productive vantage point from which to interrogate media practices, one of the most useful aspects of previous dialogues has been the multiple definitions and uses of the term *ideology* at the center of language ideologies (Woolard 1998:9). This ambiguity has prompted scholars to explore various aspects of the analytical quandaries language ideologies bring to light, such as ideology as awareness or as hegemony. Michael Silverstein has been interested in the role explicitness and awareness play in the relationship between what people believe about how language functions and what their language in fact accomplishes (1979, 2001). Just as people's beliefs, attitudes, and strategies about linguistic function and structure do not necessarily reflect people's practices of speaking, people's beliefs, attitudes, and strategies about media structure do not necessarily reflect how people use media. People's understandings of both language and media will shape, although not determine, their communicative practices. Focusing on language or media ideologies draws attention to this dynamic.

By contrast, Susan Philips foregrounds the question of power traditionally connected to analyses of ideology, rather than emphasizing questions of reflexivity. She writes: "From my point of view, this shift in terminology [to language ideology] within linguistic anthropology signals new awareness and attention to the way in which the salience and prevalence of particular ideas are themselves forms of power" (Philips 1998:213). Philips here insists that analyses of language ideologies should always pay attention to the institutionalization of these ideologies, to who benefits and who is disadvantaged by specific beliefs about language. Philips' call for a more Gramscian approach to ideology and Silverstein's emphasis on reflexivity are not antithetical to one another. The differing emphases point to the richness of language ideology as an analytical concept, a richness and diversity of definition that the authors of this volume have also found for media ideologies.

Materialities

As the articles in this volume discuss, the very materiality of media is an important reason for distinguishing media ideologies from language ideologies. The structure of a technology helps to shape the participant structure brought into being through its use, simultaneously enabling and limiting how communication can take place through that medium, how the communication circulates, and who can participate.⁴ While all authors address how the materialities of different media affect people's media ideologies, Debra Spitulnik Vidali in particular looks at U.S. young adults' media ideologies of participant structures afforded by U.S. television news. Spitulnik Vidali refuses to take as a given two widely held but contradictory U.S. stereotypes about U.S. young adults' political engagement or disengagement. The first, that U.S. young adults are apathetic about current events and disinterested in becoming engaged, informed citizens. The second, that young adults, as supposed digital natives, are more compelled by politics than ever before because of the possibilities of participatory democracy embedded in digital media. Instead, she examines young adults' beliefs about the participant structures of U.S. news media, analyzing how apathy or engagement is actively produced. Here Spitulnik Vidali explores how people's media ideologies become a basis for construing what is appropriate and possible political engagement with the nation-state (see also Laura Kunreuther and Joshua Malitsky, this volume). In all three articles, producers expect not only the content, but also the material forms of media to serve as models for how citizens in a democracy should communicate. Those watching and listening often have other ideas.

This difference in expectations between producers and audience provides a complementary vantage point to the well-known adage within linguistic anthropology that intention does not predict interpretation,⁵ despite a widespread tradition of Euro-American language ideologies that a speaker's intention should be paramount (see Duranti 1993; Robbins 2008; Silverstein 1998). This gap between intention and interpretation has a parallel in technological structures, even though, unlike most languages, media technologies are invented technologies. While we can not speak of the "intention" of a particular medium, science and technology studies have shown that designers often embed implied users and implied causal narratives within the structure of the technology. For instance, Madeline Akrich, a science studies scholar, contends that there is not only a continual tension between implied users and actual users, but also a tension between the implied social narratives and actual social practices (Akrich 1992). She writes: "technical objects not only define actors and the relationships between them, but to continue functioning must stabilize and channel these. They [technical objects] must establish systems of causality that draw on the mechanisms for the abstraction and simplification of causal pathways" (Akrich 1992:220–221). As Akrich argues, imagined sequences of causation and appropriate behavior, often simplified, are presupposed in a designed technology. For example, these complex causal and social narratives that are presupposed might include the number of users and the potential mobility of the technology. In her case studies, she

looks at how the photoelectric lighting kit is designed in Paris for stationary French rooms of a particular size, while in Senegal it was donated to youth groups who rented these generators for festivals. The kits had to be altered by the youth groups to accommodate mobility and differently sized rooms, kits that had been designed to thwart all but the most docile of users by designers concerned about fragile components. In her account, it isn't only the users that are implied, but the entire social context and series of events surrounding the generators' use. As Akrich points out, the gap between what is implied and what is actual will often be sharply revealed when technologies travel. Ethnographers of media have used this gap to advantage to reveal people's cultural assumptions and practices of social organization (see Turner 2002). This is one of the themes of this volume as well, as authors explore the ways people develop media ideologies that can be at odds with the assumptions embedded in the technologies themselves.

Paying attention to the materialities of media can also involve analyzing entextualization as a process that presents actors with a dilemma of both storage and repetition, as both Patrick Eisenlohr and Joshua Malitsky show in this volume (on entextualization, see Bauman and Briggs 1990; on media storage and repetition, see Kittler 1997 and Winkler 2004). Eisenlohr discusses one of the fundamental dilemmas in circulating utterances demarcated as part of a genre: figuring out how to make singular contextually specific utterances seem like variants, intertextually interwoven with other utterances articulated elsewhere and elsewhen. He suggests that every medium stores utterances differently, allowing people to emphasize different aspects of utterances as a basis for similarity when construing continuity. For example, semantic replication may be less important than replicating intonation patterns, depending on the privileged medium's form of storage. Here media ideologies become relevant as Muslims in Mauritius find that tape recordings of the devotional poetry, *na't*, offer a more satisfying connection to the Prophet Muhammad than written *na't*. The tape recordings provide them with models for performing *na't* themselves that they view as a more immediate, faithful, and conventionally regulated form than what they could produce with only the written word as a guide. These Muslims' media ideologies encourage them to privilege the way tape recorders allow texts to be entextualized, or bound off from a context, and then recontextualized by the speaker as a supposedly more recognizable type than the written word enables. If we take repetition to be an achievement, then both language ideologies and media ideologies play an important role in establishing when repetition is recognized, and which forms of repetition are valued.

A medium's structure affects not only people's beliefs about repetition, that is, how utterances circulate, but also people's beliefs about authorship, that is, how utterances come to be. Both Kunreuther and Eisenlohr find Goffman's distinction between author, animator, and principal useful for understanding how media ideologies and materialities can contribute to notions of authorship (Goffman 1974; see also Irvine 1996). Goffman proposes that every utterance can have three distinct production roles. The author constructs a particular denotational sequence, the animator speaks or circulates the words, and the principal is the one held socially responsible for the words. A subject can occupy all three or any combination of these roles depending on the context. In the classic linguistic anthropological example, the U.S. politician is often the one who speaks the words but does not write the speech, thus the politician is both the animator and principal, but not the author. Yet media ideologies are also at work in the ways that author, animator, and principal are understood to be conjoined, how participants attribute these roles can also depend upon participants' media ideologies. Kunreuther argues that the language and media ideologies of FM radio "direct" speech presume an alignment of author, animator and principal for FM radio announcers that promotes a subjectivity "shaped by neoliberal ideologies of the development industry and the political aspirations of a burgeoning democracy" (Kunreuther this volume). By contrast, Nepali radio announcers at the state radio stations are not seen as the principals for their own words; rather, they are under-

stood to be voicing the state's authority. Eisenlohr points to how Mauritian Muslim media and language ideologies take recorded *na't* poems to be texts animated by the speaker, but always composed by a divinely inspired author. Their understanding of how a medium allows bounded texts to circulate enables this differentiation of authorial roles. In my study of breaking up by new media in the U.S., media ideologies affect interpretations of authorial intentions, in this case the legibility of authorial intentions.⁶ As U.S. undergraduates broke up with each other, they urgently wished to understand the intentions of their soon-to-be ex-lovers and evaluated each medium in terms of its perceived ability to reveal the sender's intentions. Concepts of authorship are thus bound up with the particular media ideologies at play.

Media ideologies about media's materiality are relevant for the construction of audiences as well as authorship. Amanda Weidman discusses the middle-class audience presupposed by the gramophone recordings circulating in Madras city, India at the turn of the 20th century. A *Vikatam* artist⁷ recorded parodic skits in which the artist voiced a range of stereotyped characters, creating for the first time in India a commodified soundscape that linked types of speech to types of people. In the early 1900s, gramophones were marketed to an emerging Indian middle class, one that could consume entertainment in private domestic spaces. This is an example of Akrich's suggestion that technological designs presuppose social narratives, including locations of appropriate use. The records presented scenes that presumed a distance between the varied characters portrayed and the Madras middle-class audience playing and replaying the records. As Weidman points out: "vikatam records fixed the potentially assaulting voices of the street as those of people not to be addressed, but simply overheard" (this volume). In this and other ways these vikatam recordings instructed their implied audiences on inhabiting their new class position and engaging with their newly urban settings. In short, people's media ideologies contribute to the ways publics are imagined and addressed (Warner 2002; see also Barker 2008; Bauman and Feather 2005; Gershon 2010, ch. 5).

Remediation

Just as language ideologies are inherently comparative, so too are media ideologies. As media scholars Bolter and Grusin explain in their book *Remediation*, no medium is introduced onto an empty stage. Each new medium is instantly enmeshed in a web of media ideologies—old media determine how new media will be perceived. At the same time, every new medium alters how the already existing media are understood to shape communication. "We are arguing that remediation can work in both directions: older media can also refashion newer ones. Newer media do not necessarily supersede older media because the process of reform and refashioning is mutual" (Bolter and Grusin 1999:59 fn. 9). Remediation is the ever-changing dialogue between media ideologies as old media affect new media's reception (webpages), and new media reconfigure how people perceive and use older media (postal mail becomes "snail mail"). This process of remediation is at the heart of my article, which explores why American college students tell breakup stories that are also always stories of media switching. These students claim that different media provide different insights into other people's intentions. But these insights are always comparative—to choose to utter "it's over" by text message is also viewed as a decision not to say this face-to-face, or by calling, on voicemail, by instant messaging, and so on. What becomes salient about text messaging in these instances is often that it does not convey intonation, as a phone call might, or that texting can involve long delays between turn-taking, unlike instant messaging. Media ideologies thus are also always about remediation, about the interplay of and comparison between different media ideologies.

Bolter and Grusin argue that when we attend to remediation we must not only look at how older and newer media articulate, but also pay attention to the very act of mediation in general. For Bolter and Grusin, all technologies lie on a continuum

between immediacy and hypermediation, that is, between a perceived lack of mediation and excessive attention to mediation. For example, written devotional poetry might seem to offer a sense of direct access to the poet through exact repetition of the poet's words in a context where poetry otherwise would be repeated directly from someone's memory. Yet cassette tapes can change this sense of the written word's immediacy, providing models of intonation and pausing in addition to the written word's exact sequence of words. Thus a medium that has been valued for its immediacy may be seen as less immediate upon the introduction of other communicative technologies. I have argued elsewhere that understanding all media as placed on a continuum of immediacy and hypermediation is itself a media ideology (see Gershon 2010). It is one that has deep historical roots in Western visual traditions, as Bolter and Grusin themselves point out (see Bolter and Grusin 1999:12–14).

Both Eisenlohr and Kunreuther explore the social construction of immediacy in non-Western settings, discussing how their interlocutors used "immediacy" as a key criterion when they were valuing different media. In Eisenlohr's case, erasing a medium's presence has religious significance. For *na't* performers, the medium's presence stands for the temporal and spatial distance between the performer and the text's original moment. According to the performers' media ideology, the greater the sense of immediacy, the closer the performer is to the divine inspiration. Kunreuther also discusses a longing for a transparent medium, although she argues that, in her fieldsite, the supposed transparency conceals the social and material context in which the Nepalese media form was produced and circulated. Kunreuther also viewed transparency as creating temporal simultaneity, but unlike Eisenlohr's case, this is in the service of a national connection rather than a religious connection: listeners are all Nepali together. In both instances, people imagine that media are transparent or erased so as to claim a transcendent connection with others or an Other.

As scholars pay attention to the interplay between ideologies of older media and newer media, ideologies of voice become a prevalent site of analysis (see Eisenlohr this volume; Kittler 1997; Kunreuther this volume; Schieffelin 2000; Weidman this volume). As all these scholars point out, when faced with a new medium such as the written word, people will reevaluate voice as a medium in terms of what it can and can not accomplish. In Kunreuther's study of Nepali radio, FM radio voices are tacitly compared to Radio Nepal broadcasts produced by the state. The audience hears the FM radio voices as belonging to direct and straightforward speakers, to "someone who has learned to say what they want and not hide their intentions within poetic, metaphorical, or literary words" (Kunreuther, this volume). By contrast, the state Radio Nepali announcers are perceived to be the voice of the state because they used a "formal" intonation and many Sanskrit words. While the Radio Nepali announcers remain the official voice of government for their audiences, the FM radio announcers are vividly imagined to be fully embodied, a physicality drawn in such detail from the voice that, when finally seen, the actual body sometimes disappoints the listeners. Here the Nepali media ideologies surrounding FM radio exist in contrast to ideologies of Radio Nepali, introducing a notion of "direct" voice that alters how listeners view an already established announcer vocal style. The radio stations are taken to be so distinct from one another that the physical radio is understood to broadcast two different radio voices, and implicitly, two different media. Several Nepali interlocutors told Kunreuther: "I don't like radio, I only listen to FM." In turning to voice, Kunreuther and other authors in this volume discuss how remediation is a dialectic process in which media ideologies of older and newer media continually inform each other to such an extent that voices and bodies become understood by people on the ground as media, and in novel ways (see also Silvio 2006).

Referentiality

Several anthropologists have cautioned linguistic analysts to be wary of their own language ideologies when studying other languages (see Bauman and Briggs 2003;

Rosaldo 1982; Silverstein 1996). As they point out, Euro-American language ideologies have historically tended to privilege reference, an inclination Bauman and Briggs link to political and philosophical traditions spearheaded by Bacon and Locke (Bauman and Briggs 2003:24–25, 60; see also Silverstein 1996). Malitsky takes up this call for historical investigation with his study of the media ideologies of 1920s Soviet factographers who were in dialogue with the Moscow Linguistic Circle. The debates of this period became formative influences on Euro-American theoretical approaches to the perceived referentiality and indexicality inherent to photography and cinema. By focusing on factographers' positions, Malitsky explores an aesthetic and methodological challenge to what was the increasingly dominant socialist realist position. Factographers saw their dilemma as a problem of creating affecting and persuasive images, *persuasive* because the images appropriately mixed visual indexes by drawing together specific contexts and universal conditions of work. Images that were too acontextual would not have "documentary value." Images that were too contextually specific would not engage the viewers and thus would not be able to do "the required agitational work" (Malitsky, this volume). In short, factographers' concern with filmic and photographic images centered around their referentiality, but a referentiality that had to be both rooted in context and able to exceed its context. Because of factographers' media ideologies, they approached entextualization and visual deixis as explicit problems they had to overcome in order to convince citizens to support the Soviet state. Malitsky locates historically some emerging concerns about visual referentiality that continue to haunt debates about film and photography.

Address

As communicative technologies multiply, so too do the ways these technologies combine with media ideologies to enable specific forms of address. The political consequences of address in locatable media ideologies is a theme of Spitulnik Vidali's article. She examines how U.S. television news continually invokes a generic addressee, presupposing an audience filled with individuals that are hailed as "good citizen-news consumer, interested, always ready and available to tune in, always able to understand and process." (Spitulnik 2010) Spitulnik Vidali argues that U.S. young adults respond to the acontextual and generic personhood claimed in news media's address with a wide range of stances, all of which insist on more partiality and context than the media's generic address suggests. Spitulnik Vidali examines U.S. young adults' media ideologies that frame their supposed apathy and disengagement from the news, following Eliasoph's (1998) innovative ethnography of how apathy is produced in U.S. civil society. She shows that her interviewees explain their putative disengagement in terms that implicitly critique news shows' generic address, that is, they distrust the very role of generic and emotionally invested citizen-consumer that news shows presuppose as their audience. Yet the critiques of this generic viewer are often tacit, expressed in terms of feeling overwhelmed by information or disenchanted with the emotional tone of the news story. Spitulnik Vidali and the other authors remind readers of a concern already raised by scholars writing about language ideologies—not all language or media ideologies are equally available for debate or contestation (Kroskrity 1998:118). Some semiotic ideologies can be critiqued or rejected only tacitly, if at all.

Newness

All of the authors in this volume address the introduction of new media in terms of the ways in which people experience the "newness" of new media. Both Weidman and Kunreuther describe how existing language ideologies shape the reception of new media—the phonograph in Weidman's case, FM radio in Kunreuther's. Eisenlohr and Malitsky discuss how people transfer ideas about entextualization from one medium to another, imagining anew the ways sounds and images can refer to their

originary context. Spitulnik Vidali and I tackle the question of how people presume and experience the “newness” of new media in part by encountering a multiplicity of media ideologies. With Michael Silverstein’s (2000) critique of Benedict Anderson’s view of language (and media) ideologies in mind,⁸ I want to suggest that much work remains to be done by linguistic anthropologists and media scholars on both the “newness” of new media and the standardization of media ideologies. As Silverstein points out, semiotic ideologies do not easily become aligned across a wide range of people. Considerable effort is required for these ideologies to spread and be persuasive. Media historians have pointed to the complex techniques corporations, governments, and schools have used in the past to standardize media practice (Fischer 1992; Gitelman 2006; Marvin 1988). There are still questions left to explore that linguistic anthropologists are particularly well suited to address: When is standardization of media ideologies and practices a goal? What kind of standardization? What labor goes into achieving standardization? (see Lampland and Star 2009) For communicative technologies to be naturalized, must they also be standardized? How do media ideologies interact with language ideologies (which most likely have already been the object of processes of standardization)? And beyond questions of standardization, how else do media ideologies contribute to the “newness” of new media or the “oldness” of old media?

Conclusion

As media for communication proliferate, people are developing culturally specific, nuanced understandings of how these media shape communication and what kinds of utterances are most appropriately stated through which media. Just as people’s ideas about language and how language functions shape the ways they speak, people’s ideas about different communicative media and how different media function shape the ways they use these media. This volume is a comparative exploration of media ideologies and their persuasiveness. The authors explore how media ideologies are fundamentally influenced by local concepts of selves, relationships, and communication in general. The authors examine how media become perceived as formal or informal just as registers are perceived as formal or informal (see Irvine 1979); or how people’s ideas about entextualization and indexicality are reconfigured by their media ideologies of particular technological structures. In short, this volume explores the intersection of language ideologies and media ideologies, asking how analyses of ideas about language can inform ethnographic analyses of media beliefs and media practices.

Notes

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1. My thanks to Richard Bauman for these distinctions.
2. I want to distinguish media ideologies from semiotic ideologies of media as analytical strategies. Studying semiotic ideologies of media would be a more expansive analytical move than the authors of this volume undertake, asking scholars to see connections between ideologies of media and ideologies of other sign systems.
3. My thanks to Amanda Weidman for this point.
4. What Hutchby (2001), after Gibson (1977), terms the “affordances” of a communicative technology.
5. Or, to put it in a linguistic anthropological register, illocution does not determine perlocution.
6. An issue that Goffman’s model does not lend itself easily to addressing.
7. A genre of comic mimicry in Tamil.

8. In brief, Silverstein (2000) contends that Anderson's arguments in *Imagined Communities* (1999) presuppose a mercurial spread of language ideologies with an accompanying uniform ideological consensus. Yet how any such widespread adoption came to exist in the first place is precisely what scholars must analyze.

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