LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

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1. Introduction

This special issue of *Pragmatics* derives from a day-long symposium on "Language Ideology: Practice and Theory" held at the annual meeting of the American Anthropology Association in Chicago, November 1991. The organizing premise of the symposium was that language ideology is a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk, if such static imagery for some very dynamic processes can be forgiven. Rather than casting language ideology as an epiphenomenon, a relatively inconsequential overlay of secondary and tertiary responses (Boas 1911; Bloomfield 1944), the symposium started from the proposition that ideology stands in dialectical relation with, and thus significantly influences, social, discursive, and linguistic practices. As such a critical link, language ideology merits more concerted analytic attention than it has thus far been given.

In this first attempt to bring form to an area of inquiry, we have adopted a relatively unconstrained sense of "language ideology." Alan Rumsey's definition, based on Silverstein (1979), is a useful starting point: linguistic ideologies are "shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world "(1990: 346). We mean to include cultural conceptions not only of language and language variation, but of the nature and purpose of communication, and of communicative behavior as an enactment of a collective order (Silverstein 1987: 1-2). I use the terms "linguistic" and "language" ideology interchangeably, although in the articles that follow one might detect differences in their uses, perhaps varying with the degree to which the authors focus on formal linguistic structures or on representations of a collective order.

In order to build toward a general understanding of the cultural variability of language ideology and its role in social and linguistic life, the symposium brought

1 The symposium was organized by the three guest editors of this issue and sponsored by the Program Committee of the American Anthropological Association. We thank Jill Brody, Michele Dominy, and members of the Program Committee for enabling us to bring such a large number of participants together. This introductory paper would have been even sketchier without the positive influence of the symposium's contributors and discussants, and I thank them. Thanks also to Paul Kroskrity and Bambi Schieffelin for comments and encouragement. I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for support of my work on language ideology, although all opinions expressed here are my own.
together a spectrum of researchers. Some work in more traditional societies, others in
the post-industrial west; some have focused more on linguistic structure, others on
social process. Linguistic anthropologists have sometimes bemoaned the marginalization
of our subdiscipline from the larger field, even as language and discourse have become
central notions across the social sciences and humanities. There is also a growing
unease among some linguistic anthropologists about lack of cohesion within the
subdiscipline. A different sense of problem has created unintended intellectual divides,
whether between traditional and complex societies, western and non-western, linguistic
and social foci, "macro" and "micro". The topic of language ideology may be one much-
needed bridge between work on language structure and language politics, as well as
between linguistic and social theory. But more than just a unifying force, we hope that
attention to language ideology can be a key to a fresh and productive reformulation of
analytic problems.

2. Why Ideology?

The term ideology has been characterized in a variety of ways, in a confusing tangle of
commonsense and semi-technical meanings (Friedrich 1989: 300). If ideology is a
muddled and troublesome concept, why choose it as an umbrella under which to
gather? A simple(-minded?) reason is that the term itself has been appearing with
increasing frequency in studies of language. A casual review of work since the mid-
seventies, and particularly since the mid-eighties, turns up not only the Silversteinian
concept of linguistic ideology (1979, 1985), but also references to grammatical ideology
(Kroch and Small 1978), purist ideology (Hill and Hill 1980, 1986; Hill 1985), language
ideology (e.g., Hornberger 1988; Sonntag and Pool 1987; Woolard 1989), ideologies of
standardization (Milroy and Milroy 1985), and ideology/ies of language (e.g., Haviland
1989; Schultz 1990; Joseph and Taylor 1990). This list ranges across a variety of
disciplines which have traditionally asked rather different questions about language,
from cultural and linguistic anthropology through linguistics to education and political
science.

If we look beyond the term itself we find a wealth of studies that address
cultural conceptions of the nature of language, under the guise of metalinguistics,
attitudes, loyalty, values, prestige, stigmatization, beliefs, norms, standards, aesthetics,
hegemony, etc. From this welter of work, it becomes apparent that there is an
intellectual field in need of review and coordination, under whatever name. Your
language ideology, like your social situation, is not your country cousin, as Goffman
(1972) put it; nor is it the city slicker it may sometimes appear, to be distrusted and
kept at arm's length. Ideology needs to be analyzed systematically in the study of
language, not invoked opportunistically or dismissed summarily. In a critical essay on
social scientific notions of ideology generally, Geertz (1964) long ago called for
systematic attention to the social and what I would prefer to call semiotic processes
through which ideologies come to signify. The same must be said (and has been said
by Silverstein and others, particularly those influenced by C.S. Peirce) about ideological
conceptions of language.

The principal reason for choosing ideology as our key concept to organize this coalescing field of inquiry is that in spite of competing understandings of the term, in almost all uses it highlights the social origins of thought (Eagleton 1991). The label ideology calls attention to the socially-situated and/or experientially-derived dimension of cognition or consciousness, simultaneously positioning our research within traditionally cultural and social theoretical realms. It is this duality, with all its tensions, that we seek to capture through the choice of the term language ideology.

3. What is Ideology?

Given that ideology is not a term whose meaning is straightforward or neutral, I will briefly review here some dimensions of commonality and variation in its uses. My intent is not so much to advocate any particular understanding of the term, but simply to situate the articles that follow, pointing out possible fault lines and traps awaiting us in our efforts at comparison. And certainly I make no claim to original or comprehensive analysis, only rehearsal of a small portion of the immense literature on this topic.

In the many influential essays on ideology generally and reviews of the debates around this term, three or four central features recur, although none of them is universal to all usages. All of these features have troublesome aspects.

The first is that ideology is most typically taken as conceptual or ideational, having to do with consciousness, beliefs, notions, or ideas. For example, Friedrich (1989: 301) reviews one definition that hinges principally on this feature, of ideology as the more intellectual and conceptual constituent of culture, the basic notions that the members of a society hold about a fairly definite area such as honor, the division of labor (or we could propose, language), and the interrelations and implications of such sets of notions (italics mine; the addition of implications points away from the vision of ideology as a conscious system, toward a more structural version that will be discussed later.)

A second recurring point is that these ideological concepts or notions are viewed as derived from, rooted in, reflective of, or responsive to the experience or interests of a particular social position, although they may be presented as universally true. Such social and experiential origins are not held by all theorists to make ideology by definition false, but, unlike the first feature discussed above, they do deny temporal primacy and explanatory independence to ideology and place it in a relation to other aspects of human life that ranges from the dialectical through the secondary to the superfluous.

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2 The assertion of universality is another feature sometimes said to be a criterion of ideology, specifically by those who hold ideology to be the invention and characteristic of bourgeois society.

3 Generally, understandings of ideology seem to differ most fundamentally in whether their emphasis is on ideas or interests. Other concerns often follow from that distinction.
In a third perspective on ideology, the most central notion is that of distortion, falsity, mystification, or rationalization. Friedrich captures this as "the other fellow's ideas" (1989: 301). This negative aspect can be found in uses from Napoleon's references to the early French idéologues (Gouldner 1976: 7) through fundamentalist Marxist positions carried on by, e.g., Lukács (1971), to empiricist American sociology (e.g., Bell 1960).

The fourth feature often attributed to ideology is an intimate connection to social power and its legitimation. For J.B. Thompson, for example, ideology is signification that is "essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power - to maintaining domination... by disguising, legitimating, or distorting those relations" (1984: 4). In the strongest formulations of this principle, ideology is always the tool or property of dominant social groups; cultural conceptions belonging to oppositional or subordinate groups are by definition non-ideological.

Playing under and around these four prototypical features, there are two other, related dimensions of variation in understandings of ideology. One is the degree to which it is held to be a coherent system, and the other is the degree to which ideology is conscious and explicit. For American political theorists such as Shils, ideologies are complete and closed systems (Shils 1971 cited in Eagleton 1991: 4). But even when seen as a dimension of consciousness, ideology can be viewed as piecemeal and internally contradictory. Voloshinov, for example, does not reserve the term ideology only for organized systems of signification, but writes of the "lowest stratum of behavioral ideology" as one that lacks logic or unity (1973: 92).

For Gouldner (1976: 23), ideology is a conscious public discourse, "that part of consciousness which can be said" (Thompson 1984: 85). But in many other uses, the claim is not necessarily one of conscious, deliberate, or systematically organized thought. For example, we have seen above that Friedrich introduces the implications of conceptual systems as also ideological. Friedrich characterizes his Whorfian notion of "linguacultural ideology" (values implicit in a language and cultural system) as more unconscious than other forms that have been called ideological, while nonetheless conceptual (1989: 306-307).

The influential French structuralist school cast ideology not as an aspect of consciousness or representations at all, but rather of lived relations, to use the Althusserian (1971) formulation. Eagleton characterizes ideology in this sense as "pre-reflective, " "a particular organization of signifying practices which goes to constitute human beings as social subjects, and which produces the lived relations by which such subjects are connected to the dominant relations of production in society" (1991: 18). Here, of course, are notable similarities to Bourdieu's concept of "doxa" as opposed to heterodoxy and orthodoxy (1977). And in spite of important differences, there are also similarities to the post-Gramscian notion of hegemony as it has been interpreted by the literary theorist Raymond Williams (1977) as the "saturation of consciousness" and "structures of feeling."

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4 Whether the contradiction lies in the conceptual model of the world, or in the world which is accurately modeled, is one point of some debate.
Both the neutral understanding of ideology as cultural conceptions, and the French structuralist version of ideology as inescapable lived relations, make problematic the critical edge of ideological analysis associated with the long-standing pejorative use of the term. If ideology is an aspect of all lived human experience, there is no privileged position for its critique. But other theorists (e.g., J.B. Thompson, Eagleton, and Maurice Bloch, among those who have written on language) are less willing to blunt that critical tool. Bloch (1985) advocates distinguishing everyday cognition, derived from experience in interaction with a culturally constructed environment (Bourdieu's habitus) from ideology, a Marxian notion of systems of representation that mask social processes, legitimating social order. Similarly, John and Jean Comaroff (1991) recently have proposed a schema that distinguishes culture on the one hand from more power-charged cultural forms of ideology and hegemony on the other, in a taxonomy that is perhaps most clearly applicable to colonial and other culture contact situations.

No doubt in attempting cross-cultural comparisons of language ideology, we will have to contend with theoretical differences along these dimensions. I don't think it is of interest in this early stage of forming a field of empirical investigation to constrain the notion of ideology narrowly, although as is evident, I do most value an emphasis on the social origins of systems of signification. Surely all the phenomena I've reviewed, from seemingly neutral "cultural conceptions" to strategies for maintaining social power, are of concern in a pre-theoretical moment. But we need to be alert to our different uses and attempt to track their relations to each other and to empirical situations.

4. Approaches to language ideology

One received view in the anthropological study of language casts ideology, understood as secondary and false, as a somewhat unfortunate - though perhaps socio-culturally interesting - distractor from primary and thus "real" linguistic data. Boas (1911) proposed that language is a cultural system whose primary structure is little influenced by secondary rationalizations, and so is an exemplary target of analysis. Bloomfield's (1944) are among the most acerbic statements of the disdain for linguistic ideologies that sometimes followed from this position among structural linguists.

On other hand, those working on more social and less formal linguistic concerns in ethnically complex societies, particularly in the west, often have taken the influence of language ideology as given. A Herderian view of language as the expression or definition of identity has been acknowledged as central in coming to terms with ethnic relations and nationalism (see, e.g., Fishman 1972). But the concerns of this camp were often rather distant from those interested in linguistic forms. The concept of linguistic prestige (Weinreich 1974) and related issues of attitudes and stigmatization (e.g.,

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5 Geertz (1964) has argued that it is only right for a social scientific concept to be neutral in this sense.
Finegan 1980; Hill and Hill 1980; Mertz 1989; Woolard 1985, 1989a) linked formal and social questions, but most often language ideology was treated as relevant to language structure only in the extreme sense of the maintenance or loss of distinctive language varieties.

However, just as social context maintained a foothold and is clearly established among many researchers as a necessary aspect of linguistic analysis, so ideology was never abolished and is becoming more central to accounts of language produced from various perspectives. In fact, context and ideology often came in together. As both Errington (1985) and Irvine (1989) point out, in even the most correlational sort of sociolinguistics, from the early important work of Labov, the motive force of linguistic change lay in conceptions and evaluations of language. These surely fit under the broad banner of "ideological," used here, although Labov himself, holding to a view of ideology as overt political discourse, explicitly discounts the power of ideology to affect speech forms (1979: 329).

The ethnography of speaking has long given systematic, though often primarily descriptive, attention to language ideology, usually in the neutral sense of cultural conceptions. Work of this kind appeared, for example, in Bauman and Sherzer’s collection (1974). Bauman’s (1983) larger study of language and communication in Quaker ideology is an interesting development of the theme, since it addresses not a neutral variety of ideology but a more formal, conscious, and politically strategic form. Pursuing the social conditioning of ideology, ethnographers of speaking frequently have related language beliefs to other cultural and social forms in a society. For example, Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) and Schieffelin (1990) have cast aspects of language ideology as an explanatory link in investigations of child language acquisition, and Heath (1983) has further tied ideology and language socialization to formal education.

Such authoritative social institutions as schooling (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Collins 1986), law (e.g., Mertz and Weissbourd 1985; Haviland 1989; Conley and O’Barr 1990), and state regulation of capitalist commerce (Parmentier 1986; Silverstein 1990) have provided the terrain for some of the most pointed studies of the dimension of power in language ideology. An emphasis on the ideological aspect has given rise to new analyses of processes of linguistic standardization (e.g., Milroy & Milroy 1985; Joseph 1987; Jaffe 1991). And a number of recent studies of language politics (Silverstein 1987; Sonntag & Pool 1987; Handler 1988; Urla 1988; Grillo 1989; Woolard 1989b) specifically examine the content and signifying structure of language ideologies, taking them not just as the background to the investigation of ethnicity and language, but as a central topic.

Attention to language ideology has also come in efforts to critique - and improve - scholarly enterprises, including social analysis (Reddy’s much-cited 1979 piece on the Conduit Metaphor), linguistic theory (Rosaldo 1982 on Ilongot language ideology and

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6 In the discussion that follows, examples of research are given just to suggest the kinds of work that have been done. This is by no means an exhaustive list of significant studies in the area.

7 I thank Paul Kroskrity for reminding me of Labov’s position.
Searle's speech act theory; Verschueren's 1985 effort to use folk language theory to give firmer grounding to speech act theory) and sociological and sociolinguistic methods (Briggs 1986). These studies cover the range from "unconscious" ideology seen as implicit in speech practices, through the most conscious explanations to outsiders of appropriate language behavior.

Recently, there has been a booming reconsideration of specific western ideologies of language, fueled in large part by Foucaultian and post-Gramscian interest in discourse in the humanities and social sciences. Historians, literary theorists, sociologists, anthropologists and educationists are among those who have examined the ideology of language associated with the "will to truth," the rise of scientific discourse, Protestant religious discourse, mass literacy, and universalistic school curricula. Dominant French, English, and Anglo-American ideologies of language have been particularly subject to a wave of rediscovery and revision (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1982; Balibar 1985, 1991; Crowley 1989; Finegan 1980; various contributions to Joseph & Taylor 1990; Milroy and Milroy 1985). Historians such as Smith (1984) and Cmiel (1990) offer a wealth of material from 17th-19th century language debates which would repay close analysis from a more linguistically-centered perspective.

One other development has drawn a number of professional students of language to grapple with language ideology not as a theoretical issue, but out of a sense of personal and professional responsibility. Here I am thinking of the English-only movement in the U.S., and similar policy conflicts in other countries (see, e.g., Adams and Brink 1990). This pragmatic involvement with a phenomenon still viewed as too peripheral to merit systematic analysis in the disciplines has led to some paradoxes for those involved and, as Silverstein (1987) points out, at times some seemingly naive pronouncements.

5. Some recent proposals and hypotheses

Among the most influential formulations of the significance of linguistic ideology is Silverstein’s revision of Whorf, and his notion of "metapragmatics" (1979, 1985). While eschewing judgments of truth or falsity, Silverstein casts ideology not simply as cultural conceptions, but as distorting rationalizations of an existing practice. Its secondary character may be the most important defining feature of ideology as used by Silverstein; ideological tenets are derived from some aspect of experience and then generalized beyond that core and secondarily imposed on a broader category of phenomena. Silverstein’s focus is on linguistic structure, his goal to show not only that linguistic structure is subject to rationalization in the sense of noticing and explanation, but that rationalization actually affects this structure, or "rationalizes" it by making it more regular. I.e., in a neat move that perfectly joins the conceptual to the active side of ideology, to "understand" one’s own linguistic usage is potentially to change it (1979: 233). As Rumsey (1990: 357) has nicely restated this view:

*Language structure and linguistic ideology are not entirely independent of each other, nor is
either determined entirely by the other. Instead the structure provides formal categories of a kind that are particularly conducive to "misrecognition." And partly as a result of that misrecognition, might not the linguistic system gradually change so as to approximate that for which it was misrecognized?"

The examples from western European languages, and especially English, that Silverstein and Rumsey consider (T/V pronoun shift, the feminist attack on generic uses of "he," and direct quotation as exact representation), reveal a "drive for reference," or an ideology that the divisions and structures of language should - and in the best circumstances do - transparently fit the divisions and structures of the "real world." Kroch and Small (1978) put forward a similar claim about American English speakers' "grammatical ideology." While Silverstein seems to suggest that the drive for reference is a widely occurring phenomenon, Rumsey proposes that it is less present in Australian aboriginal "linguaiculture" than among English speakers.

Also concerned primarily with accounting for (changes in) linguistic forms, Errington has developed the notion of pragmatic salience: "native speakers' awareness of the social significance of different leveled linguistic alternants" (1985: 294-95). More salient classes of morphemes are recognized by speakers as more crucial linguistic mediators of social relations, and this is reflected in differences in their rate and manner of structural change.

Irvine makes several provocative observations about language ideology that focus on the dialectic between language ideology and social structure as much as linguistic structure. Attending to the semiotics of ideology, she notes in Senegalese Wolof "cultural ideology" an iconic link between "the kind of linguistic differentiation and the kind of social relationship it marks" (1989: 254). Tracing differences in Wolof attitudes toward the French and Arabic languages, she finds that "indexical correlations between realms of linguistic differentiation and social differentiation are not wholly arbitrary" (ibid.: 253), although she cautions against seeing linguistic variation as simply a diagram of some aspect of social differentiation. Irvine notes that in spite of the obvious importance of evaluative mediation in the models of linguistic change Labov proposed, correlational studies often have seemed in effect to suggest such a direct relation. But the correlation is in fact mediated by an ideological interpretation of the meaning of language use.

Similar developments have come in the branch of sociolinguistics that investigates multilingual situations in western societies, where the traditional topics of inquiry have been language change, maintenance and shift, language and nationalism, etc. Hill (1985), Mertz (1989) and Gal (1987, 1989), for example, join Irvine in focusing our attention on the fact that it is only through the "interpretive filter" of beliefs about language and cognition - as well as about social relations - that political and economic events have an effect on language use (Mertz 1989: 109). Nor is there anything obvious about the mediating interpretation. Analyzing ideology in terms of interests rather than simply ideas, Hill has made an important and provocative suggestion that minority language "purist ideologies" may function paradoxically to enhance the authority of those who are most marginal to minority language communities.
6. Agenda

There are several things I hope might develop out of this attempt to define a field of inquiry. The first is to enable a more systematic and grounded approach to comparison, which in turn should allow sounder characterizations of language ideology in particular societies. Comparison can help reveal the ideological (i.e., distorted or partial) dimension of whatever language process we're looking at, and it can also make problematic any too-easy claims about "the language ideology of the x." Verschueren (1985) has noted that English speakers and other Westerners can be seen to hold ideologies rather similar to Rosaldo's Ilongots, depending on the kind of data we look at. In explicitly comparative work, Rumsey (1990) also encountered difficulty in generalizing about English-language ideology, finding contradictions between high-cultural and folk forms. In advancing characterizations of the language conceptions or ideology of the people we study, we need to address the relation of the different kinds of ideology I reviewed earlier, from the overt, organized system, through the covert, gut level of the habitus, to the "lived" ideological implications of linguistic practice itself.

Given the fate of various earlier claims that language is the exemplary subject or model for social or cultural analysis, I will not make that assertion. Nonetheless, if not the exemplar, language ideology can certainly be a very productive empirical area for the renewed pursuit of an adequate understanding of the relation of ideology and practice in social life. This vexed problem is deservedly the subject of renewed interest in a number of fields, particularly social and intellectual history.

It is important to note that an interest in language ideology in no way entails a surrender to macrosocial interests and an abandonment of linguistic structure as a topic of inquiry. Silverstein argues that a grasp of language ideology is essential to understanding the evolution of linguistic structure. Participants in the symposium underline that proposition, as well as arguing further that a grasp of language ideology is equally essential to understanding the ways in which many social institutions are sustained.

What are some of the specific issues that need to be explored? Both the linguistically-oriented and those whose principal concerns lie more with social practice might pursue the question of the propensity of language for misrecognition. In politicized contests over the "true" national language, standards, etc., which linguistic features are seized on, and through what semiotic processes are they interpreted as representing the collectivity? Is there a hierarchy of linguistic features open to such ideologization? Are all aspects of communicative and linguistic practice equally ripe for distortion, and why or why not? Are they the same areas for different languages and societies? Rumsey suggests not, and Errington's idea of pragmatic salience points one direction in which the analysis might proceed.

As Rumsey has asserted, "An adequate discussion of these matters would have to consider, for each social formation, whose interests are served by the linguistic ideology's taking the form that it does, thus relating Silverstein's use of 'ideology' to its
more usual Marxian or Mannheimian senses" (1990: 356). A rather tall order, but it is the attempt to link these two notions of ideology, and to tie social and linguistic forms together through ideology, that is both most provocative and most challenging.

Beyond these topics of interest are two more practical applications of a focus on language ideology. Irvine, with other observers, has noted that "many writers...in linguistics and the social sciences...have assumed that referential communication is the only function of language" (1989: 250). We can see this view anew in very recent anthropology, such as the review of culture and cognitive science by Maurice Bloch (1991). A fuller and more powerful critique of such perspectives may be a side benefit of the more systematic analysis of language ideology generally.

Finally, in our own societies there is a wealth of public problems that hinge on language ideology. I am thinking here not only of official language movements, but also, to cite examples in the U.S., the question of free speech and racial harassment (see R. Harris in Joseph & Taylor 1990); the meaning of "multiculturalism" in schools and texts; a recent Supreme Court ruling that allows the exclusion of jurors who might rely on their own native speaker understanding of non-English testimony; and even the question of journalists' responsibilities and the truthful representation of direct speech as debated in the much-discussed Janet Malcolm case. Coming to grips with such public issues means coming to grips with the nature and working of language ideology.

7. Organization of the issue

The articles in this issue, while by no means simply transcriptions of the meeting proceedings, are not offered as polished final products. Rather, they should be taken as reports from work in progress along a rather new line of inquiry. The appearance of our work here, while possibly premature from some points of view, responds to the encouraging demand of a significant part of the symposium audience.

The order of the articles follows the subsessions of the symposium, although unfortunately it has not been possible to publish all of the original presentations at this time. Discussants' commentaries are included here after the group of papers on which they are based. The editors have chosen to retain some of the discussants' references to conference papers that do not appear here, because we believe the points to be cogent, significant, and accessible. Our apologies if this causes difficulties for any readers.

The first group of papers focus primarily on the "scope and force" (Geertz 1968) of language ideologies, by which we mean the propensity of particular cultural models to affect linguistic and social behavior, and the range (scope) of social phenomena over which they exert influence. Ideologies that develop out of one kind or domain of speech activity can become elaborated as key ideas and hold sway over other domains of activity, shaping a variety of institutions and formal structures. The

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8 But note that Silverstein himself has explored this relation in his work on gender ideology and monoglot standard ideology.
exportation of such models from one area of human activity and communication to
another, as well as from one social group to another, is a topic of concern.

The second set of papers narrows this focus on the force of language beliefs,
looking more closely at how language ideology plays out a central role in particular
institutions of power in society. The last group of papers reconsider some of the
assumptions that may underpin our emphasis in the first two sections. While in looking
at the "scope and force" of ideological tenets we tend to focus on dominant ideologies,
most of the papers in the final section emphasize multiplicity, contradiction, and
contention among ideologies within particular societies.

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