

Negotiating communicative imaginaries: Definitional debates and language ideologies in a critical race theory hearing

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Abstract. Between January and March 2022, the South Carolina Education and Public Works Committee held a series of hearings to consider five bills that were introduced in the State House, all of which were seeking to restrict how race could be taught and discussed in schools. As similar “anti-CRT” bills were introduced in a majority of U.S. states, many ensuing political debates focused on disagreements over the meaning and usage of the term “critical race theory.” Proponents and opponents of the bills oriented to starkly different understandings of the definition of CRT, and they relied on different language ideologies to defend those understandings. In examining the relationship between language ideologies and political strategies in over 21 hours of public debates about anti-CRT bills, this project analyzes instances when interlocutors used the same term to invoke different meanings; both Republicans and Democrats treated CRT as a semiotic abbreviation (Slota 2019), yet the speech chains invoked by this abbreviation were vastly different. For Republicans, CRT invoked an educational praxis aimed at accusing White students of racism; for Democrats, CRT referred to an advanced legal theory that had never been present in K-12 schools. This paper focuses on language ideologies used in instances of explicit definition, ultimately finding that these ideologies depended both on the political stance of the speaker (for or against the bills) and their political role (legislator or public testifier).

Keywords. language ideologies; critical race theory; political discourse; discourse analysis; speaker role

1. Introduction. Inspired by a conservative movement that swept the United States starting in 2020, several anti-critical race theory (CRT) bills were introduced in the South Carolina State House between 2021 and 2022. This paper analyzes the language ideologies that South Carolinians on opposing sides of a deeply partisan issue oriented to during debates among politicians and the public about critical race theory and education. Much of this discussion revolved not merely around the fairness of the proposed laws but also about what the term “CRT” meant. For example, those in favor of the proposed legislation saw CRT as a curriculum active in K-12 schools, while those who opposed the bills defined CRT as an academic and legal theory that analyzes U.S. institutions and their impact on racial inequities.

In discussing the meaning of CRT, participants of this public debate invoked disparate language ideologies in order to rationalize their moral and political interests (cf. Gal & Irvine 2019). This paper considers how these language ideologies entered these public debates in South Carolina over the course of the three months, starting in January of 2022, when the five bills were considered by the South Carolina House Education and Public Works committee, until March of 2022, when Republican legislators rewrote the bills into one, on which the committee

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then voted. During these months, members of that committee (twelve White Republicans and six Black Democrats) held four public hearings: in the first, they debated critical race theory amongst themselves, and in the next three they invited testimony from South Carolinians, totaling twenty-one hours of public debate. I specifically examine how Democrats and Republicans sometimes diverged and sometimes converged in terms of how they understood words to function (Keane 2018). Using a qualitative method of discourse analysis of these public hearings, I illustrate the strategies speakers used in attempting to define CRT and the language ideologies used to rationalize those definitions. I argue that both political stance of the speaker (as being for or against the proposed bills) and their political role (as being a legislator or civilian testifier) determined the strategies and ideologies used in making meaning of “CRT.”

2. Background and data. In 2020, the topic of critical race theory (CRT) became a national talking point in U.S. media discourses, starting on the conservative cable network Fox News. The topic was largely presented in terms of two mutually exclusive sides: Conservatives saw CRT as a curriculum that had infiltrated all levels of schooling, while liberals argued that CRT was a “law school concept” that had no presence outside of the most advanced levels of higher education. Fox News featured conservative commentators and Republican lawmakers who used “critical race theory” to describe corporate diversity trainings and K-12 lesson plans about white privilege. This understanding of CRT was soon circulated further by high-level Republican politicians at the national level. Within months, state and local politicians had taken up the issue and began to introduce bills prohibiting the teaching of critical race theory in schools. Conservative think tanks began providing templates for state and local bills, often using definitions and talking points that had been established on Fox News. As these bills reached school boards and state houses, the fight over CRT became local, and by 2021, Republicans in the majority of U.S. states had introduced bills aimed at banning the topic of critical race theory from schools (Benson 2022; Wallace-Wells 2021). These local uptakes of a national issue provide the opportunity to look at what happens when these polarized understandings of CRT come into direct contact.

In South Carolina, a series of five anti-CRT bills were introduced in the state legislature from 2021 to early 2022. All five bills aimed to restrict the teaching of “controversial topics,” but varied in scope: some aimed exclusively at K-12 schools, while others included colleges and universities, and some included topics concerning gender and sexuality as well as race. I consider language used over the course of four hearings held by the House Education and Public Works Committee. The first hearing, in January 2022, was structured as a question-and-answer among the committee members. After receiving copies of the five bills, the representatives were invited to ask questions directed at the chair of the committee and the committee’s director of research. For this first hearing, members of the public were present as audience members but were not able to testify. Most questions were answered by the research director, though debate amongst the committee members was also common. Representatives were not restricted in terms of speaking time or number of speaking opportunities; therefore, follow-up questions and extended exchanges occurred. In the following three hearings, representatives heard testimonies from members of the public. Each speaker was given three minutes to speak for or against the passage of one or more of the bills. Following three minutes of testimony, the representatives were invited to ask the speaker questions. It was during these follow-up questions that exchanges about the meaning of critical race theory often took place, and it was most common for these questions to be posed as a challenge from a political opponent. I analyze the acts of definition

(30 occurred) in which either a representative or a member of the public presented any definition of critical race theory.

3. Analysis. The first half of my analysis broadly illustrates the strategies speakers used in attempting to define *CRT* during the four public hearings about the five proposed bills. Those who supported the bills and those who did not generally oriented to different types of arguments. In addition, lawmakers and the public generally focused on different issues. Across the 30 acts of definition, four general kinds of propositions were implied: that *CRT* means multiple things, that *CRT* is an accusation, that *CRT* is NOT an accusation, and that *CRT* is an academic framework. Table 1 provide examples of these propositions.

Implicit proposition	Example of explicit utterances
<i>CRT means multiple things</i>	<p>“it is a concept that has evolved, changed over time in the public forum”;</p> <p>“<i>CRT</i> is...like the proverbial snowball. It keeps getting things added to it, it seems it keeps growing in its definition”;</p> <p>“there are two parts of <i>CRT</i>. One part of it is the theory part of it, which everyone says doesn't exist. And it's not taught in schools...the second part of it is the activism part of it. And that's what's dangerous”</p>
<i>CRT is an accusation</i>	<p>“so if you want to define it, it's basically just saying, you're at fault for everything in the past”;</p> <p>“<i>CRT</i>... is the purpose to make sure that person feels uncomfortable, to make sure that person feels guilt”;</p> <p>“it's still the same radical agenda...whether you call it critical race theory, culturally responsive teaching or social emotional learning, it is all the same”</p>
<i>CRT is NOT an accusation</i>	<p>“these bills include a false definition of <i>CRT</i>, there is no old definition, or new colloquial definition”;</p> <p>“it's not a new <i>CRT</i> definition. It's a wrong <i>CRT</i> definition”;</p> <p>“the definition that was shared a few moments ago in regards to critical race theory was not a factual definition”</p>
<i>CRT is an academic framework</i>	<p>“critical race theory is an academic concept developed by legal scholars in the late 1970s and 1980s”;</p> <p>“<i>CRT</i>, as I understand it is defined as an academic course of study that started at the law school level”</p> <p>“critical race theory, a graduate level law course, is not taught in K-12 schools”</p>

Table 1. Four implicit propositions were used to define *CRT*.

A general pattern emerged by which supporters of the bill differed from their opponents, as shown in Table 2. Bill supporters (Republican legislators and members of the public) generally focused on the fact that *CRT* could mean different things and that *CRT* was an accusation of White people as racist. Bill opponents (Democratic legislators and members of the public), on the other hand, most often defined *CRT* in terms of what it was not; specifically, opponents denied bill supporters’ definitions of *CRT* as an accusation.

Implicit proposition	Bill supporters	Bill opponents
<i>CRT means multiple things</i>	10	1
<i>CRT is an accusation</i>	9	
<i>CRT is NOT an accusation</i>		5
<i>CRT is an academic framework</i>		5

Table 2. Bill supporters and opponents made different propositions in defining CRT.

Yet a more complex pattern emerges when we consider the participant roles that speakers were adopting in the event—that is, whether participants were legislators or members of the public. As shown in Table 3, legislators most commonly highlighted CRT’s multiple possible meanings when defining it (10 out of 13 total instances of definition from lawmakers). By contrast, CRT was defined as having multiple meanings by a member of the public on only one occasion. Instead, definitions by public testifiers focused on whether CRT was or was not an accusation. Members of the public also defined CRT as an academic framework more often than the legislators did.

Implicit proposition	Legislators	Members of the public
<i>CRT means multiple things</i>	10	1
<i>CRT is an accusation</i>	2	7
<i>CRT is NOT an accusation</i>		5
<i>CRT is an academic framework</i>	1	4

Table 3. Legislators and members of the public made different propositions in defining CRT.

This pattern of difference between Republican and Democratic legislators as well as between members of the public who supported or opposed the bill is summarized in Table 4 below.

Implicit proposition	Bill supporters		Bill opponents	
	Republican Legislators	Public	Democratic Legislators	Public
<i>CRT means multiple things</i>	9	1	1	
<i>CRT is an accusation</i>	2	7		
<i>CRT is NOT an accusation</i>				5
<i>CRT is an academic framework</i>			1	4

Table 4. Summary table of implicit propositions offered by stance and role.

As we can see, although the patterns are not entirely categorical, both Republican legislators and members of the public who supported the bill were generally aligned in terms of the two implicit propositions they oriented to, although the former group tended to orient toward one proposition and the latter to the other. Republican legislators tended to more strongly orient to the proposition that *CRT means multiple things*, using language such as “a concept that has evolved, changed over time” and “it seems it keeps growing in its definition” in describing the term, though they also sometimes suggested that *CRT is an accusation* particularly against White students, using language like “it’s basically just saying, you’re at fault for everything in the past”

in defining it. As noted, members of the public who aligned with Republicans in supporting the bills shared these two basic propositions with the Republican lawmakers, but they prioritized the understanding of CRT as an accusation against White people, describing it as a “radical agenda” or “indoctrination” over the claim that it has multiple meanings. Seven acts of definition by public supporters of the bills highlighted the accusatory aspect of this definition. Only one act of definition by a public supporter acknowledged multiple valid meanings, describing CRT as having two functions: as an academic theory (as the bill opponents defined it) and as activism (as an accusation of racism).

The pattern between Democratic legislators and their supporters (bill opponents) is less clear, primarily because only one Democrat defined CRT throughout the hearings. However, their alignment may be inferred by the fact that they did not orient to the propositions offered by bill supporters (e.g., that CRT was an accusation) and among those who define CRT as an academic framework, all were bill supporters (one legislator and four members of the public). The one Democratic legislator who attempted to define CRT highlighted both its definitional multiplicity (“it depends where you come from”) and the history of CRT as an academic framework, pointing to its purpose as a tool for analysis. Members of the public who aligned with Democrats in opposing the bills relied on two propositions in their acts of definition. Most often, they refuted bill supporters’ definitions of CRT as an accusation against White people, claiming that definition of CRT was “arbitrary,” “not factual,” or “a false definition.” They also defined CRT as an “academic course of study,” an “academic concept,” and a “graduate level law course.”

The patterns in these thirty instances of definition suggest that supporters and opponents of the bills were answering different questions. While opponents were answering a more straightforward definitional question (*What is CRT?*), supporters of the bills were answering a question about the impact of CRT in schools (*What effect does CRT have on students?*). These different focuses are the results of speakers’ different “communicative imaginaries” about CRT (Slotta 2019). These imaginaries treat the phrase *CRT* as an abbreviation for entire histories, narratives, and ideologies. Though both supporters and opponents treated *CRT* as a semiotic abbreviation, the speech chains invoked by this abbreviation were vastly different. For bill supporters, *CRT* invoked an educational praxis involving teacher trainings about implicit bias and Social and Emotional Learning curricula; for bill opponents, *CRT* referred to an advanced legal theory that was definitively not present in K-12 schools. These different communicative imaginaries resulted in different focuses when talking about the same topic. When *CRT* pointed to a specific academic theory for speakers, their aim was to understand that academic theory (*What is CRT?*). When the imaginary evoked concerned specific curricula in school, however, the focus was on the way that educators and students understand and interact with the phrase (*What effect does CRT have on students?*).

In the second part of my analysis, I suggest that these definitional differences related to differently positioned speakers evoking four different ideologies of linguistic meaning. Some definitions relied on a lexicalist ideology of language, according to which words’ meanings are contained in the words themselves (Chun 2016). For example, when a member of the public (see Example 4 below) noted that “I don’t know what the real definition is,” she treated *CRT* as if it had an immutable “dictionary definition.” Other definitions pointed instead to a contextualist ideology, according to which the meaning of words is derived from the larger context in which they are uttered (Chun 2016). For example, the Democratic legislator’s claim (see Example 2 below) that “[your understanding] depends on your ... experiences where you come from”

acknowledged that different people might understand CRT differently, or that its definition could have changed over time. Some definitions also relied on a baptismal ideology of language, wherein a word's meaning comes from its genesis (Hill 2008), such as when a speaker (see Example 3 below) asked, "why are we redefining theories that are already in place?," suggesting that the definition of CRT was settled by its original users. These definitions pointed to critical race theory's academic origins to define it. Other definitions focused instead on a performative ideology of language, according to which a word's meaning comes from its impact, rather than its definition (Hill 2008). This ideological orientation can be seen when a White member of the public (see Example 4 below) described it as "a political and social agenda that our kids don't need right now," pointing to CRT's potential to harm students, who appeared to be imagined as White. Definitional acts did not always rely on only one of these ideologies to the exclusion of all others; instead, it was common for speakers to draw on multiple ideologies in their explanations of CRT, though I focus on only one in each of the following examples.

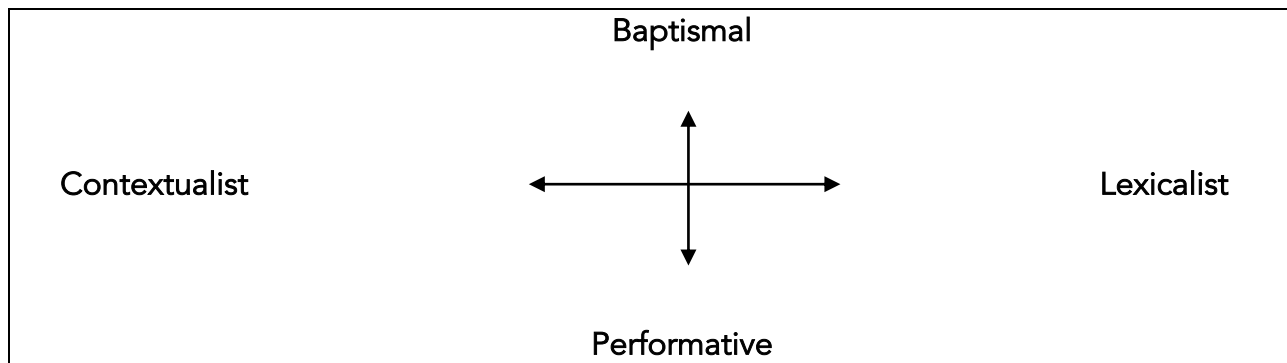


Figure 1. Field of language ideologies

The ideologies used depended on both the stance of the speaker (whether they were for or against the bills) and their position (whether they were a legislator or member of the public). Supporters of the bill emphasized the performative nature of language, while opponents emphasized the baptismal meaning of *CRT*. At the same time, however, both Republican and Democrat legislators, despite their different stances on the bill, both appealed to a contextualist ideology, acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings of the word *CRT*, as shown in the next two excerpts, while members of the public appealed to a lexicalist belief that there was a "correct" definition. The use of contextualist ideologies by the legislators gave the impression of a descriptive approach to language; even while prioritizing particular meanings over others, they recognized that their opponents were drawing on a meaning that could be felt to be correct from their perspective. In contrast, the members of the public who testified relied on a prescriptive approach when asserting that their definition was the only correct one.

In Example 1, one of the bill's authors describes his bill (H.4799) to the committee by adopting a contextualist ideology. Specifically, he suggests that the meaning of *CRT* in "colloquial" use "today" (the meaning he includes in the bill) is not the same as its "historical" or "law school" one.

Example 1: Republican orientation to contextualist ideology¹

1 we could give you a historical one of
2 about a law school concept
3 or we could get into what is colloquially known today as critical race theory I think
there's a
4 a difference between those two?
5 um uh I think the colloquial modern day version would be
6 any of the things listed at the front of the bill and that would be (.)
7 prioritizing um or (.)
8 saying one group is inferior to the other based on sex, religious (.) affiliation um
9 national origin uh race, ethnicity¹, et cetera
10 I understand your position that critical race theory in its *infancy* was a law school
concept um
11 I get that.
12 But colloquially today, I think we all know critical race theory is and
13 and the definition is- is well defined in 4799.

In this excerpt, the speaker acknowledges two understandings of the meaning of CRT: “a historical one of—about a law school concept” (line 1-2) and a “colloquial modern day version” (line 5). However, he clearly prioritizes the second definition, suggesting that the meaning has changed, rather than expanded. In describing the first, he uses the words “historical” (line 1) and “infancy” (line 10), suggesting that this first definition is outdated and therefore possibly obsolete. In contrast, he uses the words “today” (twice: lines 3 and 12) and “modern day” to refer to the second definition, which is the one present in the bill. These descriptors again emphasize the fact that the distinction between these two definitions is time-based: the “law school concept” was once valid, but the definition in the bill is the more modern, and therefore more valid, definition of critical race theory. In addition to drawing a distinction between an outdated and a contemporary definition of the term, he also positions the “historical” definition as elitist, in contrast to the modern, populist definition. In using “colloquial” three times (lines 3, 5, 12) to refer to the definition used in the bill, the representative suggests that his definition is more valid than the previous not only because it is more modern, but because it is more widely understood. He contrasts the former definition as a “law school concept” with the present one as a colloquial concept, suggesting that his audience should prioritize a definition that is more widely understood over one that is favored in elite spaces such as law school. As such, his contextualist understanding acknowledges multiple definitions, but does not consider all as equally valid. He draws on populist values to imply that the contemporary and popular definition takes precedence over a historical and elite one.

In the second example, a Democratic representative also draws on a contextualist ideology as he asks questions of the designated research director for the committee, a special member whose role it is to answer legal questions about the bills. The representative proposes a definition of CRT in a public performance of an attempt to understand it. He begins with the proposition that CRT is an academic framework (line 3). After the research director’s response confirms that this definition is one among many, the representative then amends his definition to acknowledge other possible understandings of CRT (lines 15-16), pointing to its meaning as multiple. Example 2 represents the only time a Democratic representative attempted to define critical race

¹ Transcribed as pronounced.

theory, and, in contrast to the ways Republicans defined the term, the speaker's act of definition was embedded in clarifying questions, presenting uncertainty about the definitions he did use.

Example 2: Democrat use of contextualist ideology

- 1 Would you agree then would you agree that um
- 2 that CRT in a real sense that we try to define this as is a
- 3 an analysis of how race impart² systems and institutions?
- 4 That's what that's what we're *dealing* with?
- 5 How the how the impart of race and the impact that it has on *individuals*
- 6 and their feelings *towards* race? Is that is that is
- 7 I'm just trying to I'm just trying to again
- 8 put a pin in this whole definition thing
- 9 [answer omitted]
- 10 ... okay we want to we want to see how history
- 11 have impacted race?
- 12 or race how race have impacted history?
- 13 I'm just ask- y'know
- 14 I'm just- I'm- and it's maybe a rhetorical question
- 15 Maybe it's a rhetorical question, because- because it because it depends on
- 16 it depends on your- your experiences where you come from
- 17 how you manage race, sex, religion, color um [sighs]

In line 2, the legislator makes it clear he is attempting to define *CRT*, but he only does so in the form of interrogatives directed at the research director, thereby performing a lack of understanding of the term, at least as the Republicans are using it. In his opening questions, the speaker describes *CRT* as “an analysis of how race impa[ct] systems, institutions [and] individuals” (lines 3-5). Following the research director's answer, in which he validated the Democrat's proposed definition as one definition among many, the Democratic speaker again describes *CRT* as an analysis (“we want to see how history have impacted race?” (line 10-11)), posed again as a question. He then clarifies that his question may be rhetorical (line 14), before repeating the director's assertion that multiple understandings of the term exist. In other words, as in Example 1, the representative draws on a contextualist ideology in acknowledging multiple meanings. Whereas the Republican representative attributed this multiplicity of definitions to the passing of time and popular evolution, while suggesting that the “colloquial” definition was the more valid one, the Democratic representative pointed to different perspectives as an explanation of divergent understandings of the term (see Chun 2017): “it depends on your experiences” (line 16). In doing so, he does not explicitly prioritize one definition, although he may implicitly do so by making only the academic one explicit—that *CRT* is a theoretical framework for analysis.

In contrast to legislators, members of the public preferred a lexicalist ideology that privileged one “correct” meaning over others. In Example 3, a Black member of the public speaks in opposition to all the bills under consideration. In contrast with the representatives who acknowledged multiple definitions, this speaker draws a sharp distinction between *true* and *false* definitions.

² Transcribed as pronounced.

Example 3: Opponent's use of baptismal ideology

- 1 We know that the definition that was shared a few moments ago
- 2 in regards to critical race theory
- 3 was *not* a factual definition.
- 4 Because my
- 5 I am challenged by that because we *never*
- 6 I have never seen anyone *redefine* (.) a definition from
- 7 Piaget or Floyd as it pertains to child development
- 8 So why are we *redefining* theories that are already in place.
- 9 Use the true definition.
- 10 Stick to that and stop making up stuff.

Specifically, the speaker asserts that the definitions used in the bills are false and that the original academic definition is true. She describes the bills' definition (one that "was shared a few moments ago") as "not a factual definition" (line 3), a "redefin[ition]" (line 8) and "ma[de] up" (line 10) by the bills' authors and supporters. She argues that the baptismal definition is the only valid one by drawing parallels with other academic concepts, claiming that academic theories in general are not subject to redefinition. In saying "I have never seen anyone redefine a definition from Piaget or Floyd³," invoking the names of academics, she suggests that once academic "theories...are already in place" (line 8) they are fixed. Additionally, her definition relies on a lexicalist understanding of language, in which the words themselves carry fixed meanings regardless of the context of their use.

Finally, in Example 4, a White member of the public speaking in support of the bills adopts a performative ideology, simultaneously dismissing the definitional question and relying on an understanding of CRT as an accusation against White students.

Example 4: Supporter's use of performative ideology

- 1 CRT?
- 2 I don't know what the real definition is.
- 3 I don't know if we know what the real definition is.
- 4 But it's part of a political and social agenda
- 5 that our kids just don't *need* right now.
- 6 Let 'em be kids.

This speaker immediately rejects the definitional question that opponents of the bill are attempting to answer (*What is CRT?*), focusing instead exclusively on the question of CRT's effects (*What effect does CRT have on students?*). In fact, she not only rejects the need for a "real definition" (line 2) but suggests that a collective "we" (line 3), perhaps including all participants in the hearings, are equally ignorant of the definition of CRT. Regardless of not knowing a "real" definition, she asserts that CRT is "part of a political and social agenda" that students should not be implicated in. In doing so, she dismisses the definitional debate altogether, instead prioritizing a performative ideology of language, in which the impact of language is more important than any

³ *Freud* was possibly intended here to make the point that theoretical concepts defined by scholars such as Piaget and Freud would not be redefined.

referential meaning. At the same time, however, she does not reject the idea that there may be a “real” definition—she simply does not think that definition is relevant to the debate at hand. This excerpt represents the stance taken by many of the bills’ supporters, who focused exclusively on the performative impact of CRT. This stance stood in sharp contrast to the testimonies of the bills’ opponents, whose baptismal ideologies placed the term *CRT* as one used solely in higher education and, therefore, as unable to have any performative impact on K-12 students. The following table summarizes how those who took different stances towards the bill and adopted different roles in the event oriented to the four different ideologies mentioned above.

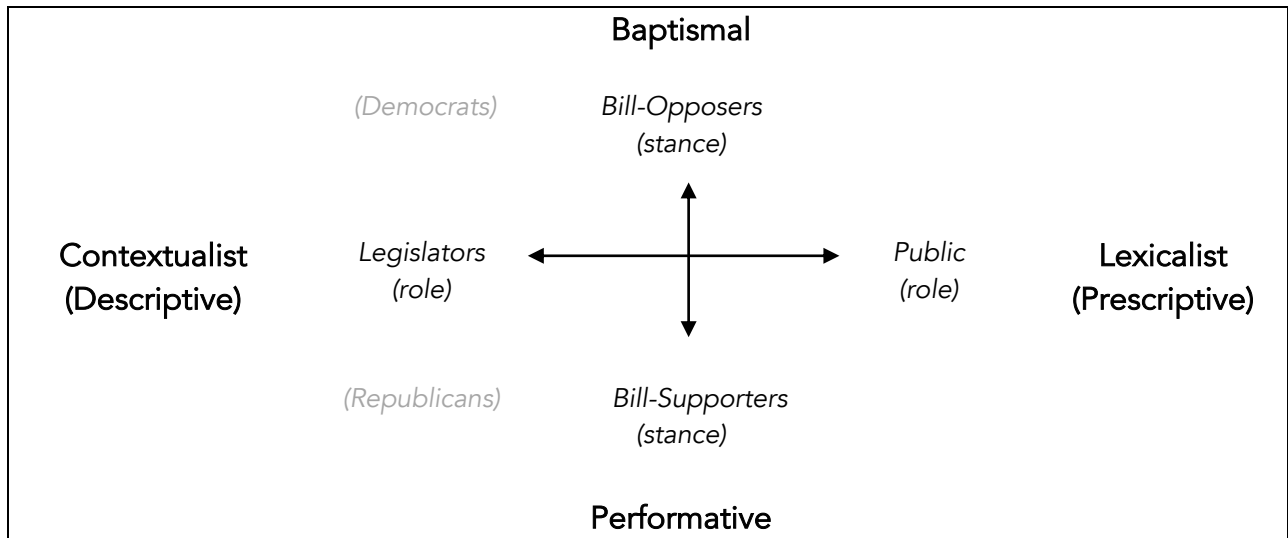


Figure 2. Field of language ideologies and participant roles and stances

4. Discussion. My analysis illustrates how participants in four hearings about anti-CRT bills in the South Carolina State House invoked language ideologies that helped to rationalize their stances toward the bills. I have illustrated how the particular language ideologies they oriented to were closely related to both their particular stance—whether they supported or opposed the bills—as well as their participant role—whether they were legislators in the State House or members of the public. Republican legislators drew on contextualist ideologies to acknowledge multiple possible meanings of CRT but prioritized a performative ideology of language in emphasizing the negative effect of CRT on White students. Members of the public who testified in favor of the bills also prioritized a performative ideology, often discussing their worries about the effects of a CRT curriculum on their own (White) children. In the only act of definition by a Democratic legislator, the representative used a baptismal ideology in pointing to CRT as an academic framework and a contextual ideology to describe understandings of CRT as dependent on perspective. Members of the public who opposed the bills used both lexicalist and baptismal ideologies to do so. They most often rejected bill supporters’ performative understandings of CRT, denying that CRT is a K-12 curriculum that harms students. When they did define it themselves, they described it as an academic and legal theory, using a baptismal ideology to reject deviations from the original meaning of critical race theory.

Given that baptismal ideologies point to specific, original language, and performative ideologies rely on the context of language effect, one might have expected uses of the baptismal ideology to align with lexicalist ideologies and performative ideologies to align with

contextualist. In the data, however, this was not the case. Instead, legislators used contextualist ideologies, regardless of whether they also drew on baptismal or performative ideologies, and members of the public used lexicalist ideologies in addition to both baptismal and performative ideologies. In other words, the lexicalist/contextualist division was based on participant role rather than political position. At the same time, the use of baptismal or performative ideologies depended on political position: those who supported the bills emphasized the performative effects of CRT, while those who opposed the bills highlighted the baptismal meaning.

The use of contextualist ideologies by the Republican and Democratic legislators gave the impression of a descriptive approach to language; even if they prioritized different meanings, they recognized the definitions their opponents were drawing on. In contrast, the members of the public were less likely to appeal to a contextualist ideology. They approached language prescriptively, insisting on their own, correct definition and denying the validity of others'. Therefore, it seems that two factors determined speakers' understanding of critical race theory: political position determined the language ideology, while participant framework determined whether the speaker took a prescriptive or descriptive approach to language.

It is perhaps unsurprising that bill supporters would rely on a performative ideology to highlight the potential negative effects that their bills were meant to combat and that opponents would deny the performative in favor of the baptismal, emphasizing that the bills in question were pointless given that CRT was never discussed in educational settings outside of higher education. It is less clear, however, why legislators used a more descriptive approach and public citizens used a more prescriptive approach to language. It could be that the legislators were performing bipartisanship, since it was their role to debate and cooperate with their opponents. It is also possible that citizens were prevented by the hearings' format (a three-minute testimony) from performing nuanced negotiations of meaning in the same way that the legislators were expected to. They may also have been restricted by their role in the political process; though the testimonies often became debates with legislators, they were there only to present a case for or against the bills.

In March of 2022, after the hearings had concluded, Republican House members revised the five anti-CRT bills into one. The final bill largely kept the same language as the original five but removed the phrase *critical race theory* altogether, naming the bill instead the "Transparency and Integrity in Education Act" (H.5183). In other words, if the use of contextualist ideologies were performances of bipartisanship, these performances were ultimately fruitless. The opponents' attempts to focus on a prescriptive definition and "correct" what they saw as false understandings of CRT had no legislative effect, as the content of the bills remained largely unchanged. The Republicans' acknowledgements of definitional multiplicity had no presence in the bill itself, and so the opponents' perspectives and testimonies were ultimately erased from the process. The bill passed out of committee with unanimous support from Republicans and unanimous opposition from Democrats and went on to pass out of the State House. Though it failed to pass a Senate vote in 2022, Republicans continue to advance "curriculum transparency" bills in the South Carolina Legislature in 2023.

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ⁱ Transcription conventions:

<u>underline</u>	Focus of analysis
?	Rising contour
.	Falling contour
[line breaks]	Intonation units
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis (pitch, amplitude)
[brackets]	Supralinguistic detail
(.)	Short pause