The Routledge Handbook of Language in Conflict

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Introduction

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Introduction
Textual choice and communication in conflict

Lesley Jeffries

1.1 Why textual choices matter in conflict

This opening part of the Handbook concerns aspects of language which can be seen as both most and least obviously related to conflict. While the words we choose to use may appear to the lay-person as the most obvious way to offend or pacify those we find ourselves in conflict with, this section concerns not how we threaten (or find agreement with) others, but how we create a view of the world that may exacerbate – or ameliorate – situations of unacceptable conflict. We will consider the more direct interpersonal aspects of linguistic choices in Section II, but for now we will see how the effects of what we say/write – and how we say/write it – may feed into the fundamental structures of our worldview with the consequence of putting us at odds with those holding a different or an opposing worldview. While the worldview we create by our textual choices often directly impinges on our audience(s), it is convenient to separate out the textual choices from their (interpersonal) effects in order to make some progress in understanding each strand of communication.

1.1.1 Textual choices create an ideational/ideological worldview

The way in which we express ourselves includes many choices which together build up a worldview which our texts (whether spoken or written) present to the audience. This worldview makes assumptions about how the world is, particularly the human world. It delineates the shape, size, timescale and social structure of the world in the text and may imply or state how the participants, human and other, typically behave, or what typical characteristics they may have as well as the specific behaviours and characteristics the text is concerned with at any one point. A text may, for example, present people with certain characteristics (race, colour, gender, sexuality, age) as essentially good or bad, on the basis of those characteristics. A place or an institution may be painted in glowing or dark colours with little or no evidence and as part of the background of the text. These processes are not in themselves wrong or harmful. They are an inevitable consequence of describing (a version of) the world in texts.

After Halliday (1985), we may label this worldview, using one of his “metafunctions”, as ideational, by contrast with the interpersonal metafunction of language which we will
consider in Section II. Thus, any text (e.g. “I’m boiling”) is likely, at one and the same time, to be presenting a particular (ideational) view of the world (e.g. the room is very warm) and may also be aiming for some interpersonal effect (e.g. for your hearer to open the door to cool the room down). The way in which both of these aims are achieved at once varies in relation to textual choices and context (and it provides linguistic scholarship with a great proportion of its more difficult subject matter).

When we consider texts relating to conflict situations at any level, from personal to international, we often encounter not only a worldview but a worldview with certain implied values. Thus, we can see that some texts may provide relatively benign (though nevertheless possibly contested) views of the world (e.g. whether or not the room is actually too warm can be a subjectively contested view) and others may provide not only ideational information on what the world is like, but also ideological information on the values espoused, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the producer of the text. Thus, a comment that the restaurant you are going to provides vegan food may demonstrate either the ideology of the speaker (that s/he does not think human beings should exploit the animal world for food/clothing and therefore approves of this option) or an ideology whereby the speaker thinks it right to demonstrate respect for such views in their hearer(s), whatever their own views. Whichever of these options is true in the situational/interpersonal context, the very text of an utterance like “We can go to Hansa’s – they have vegan food there” itself embodies the value that on some level, vegan food is a good thing. Textual meaning, then, may carry the consciously-intended ideological outlook of the producer, but it may also simply reflect the subconscious ideological assumptions of the society or group in which the text is produced. We cannot necessarily know which of these is true of any text and in a way, the point is moot since it is how the text propagates ideation – and ideology – that we are concerned with here. Much communication in conflict appears to centre on the intended meanings of the participants in what they say or write, but this could be a red herring when what we need to discuss is the effects of their texts, irrespective of conscious intention.

Clearly, the values or ideologies embedded in texts produced during communication in a conflict situation may be precisely those which are contested by the conflict itself. As we will see below, this may be during a particular episode between parties to a well-defined conflict or it may be part of a longer, slower, debate across society and through history about what is acceptable and unacceptable. All such debate to the extent that it is respectful and open is preferable to physical combat. More often, though, there is no debate at all about the most important of the disagreements. These are the ones that are embedded at a level of textual meaning that is least accessible to challenges and may not even be clear to the text producers. The following section discusses the nature of such hidden meanings.

1.1.2 Textual choices are not only propositional but also hidden

Texts, however long or short, are the combination of fundamental linguistic meaning (i.e. structures/words/semantics) with particular contexts of use. We will discuss the wider situational and social context later, but here we will address the particular issue of what makes textual meaning different from basic linguistic meaning. We can visualise the textual layer of meaning as being added to the basic propositional meaning by the choices made between alternatives on a particular occasion of use. This is the reason that it can justifiably be linked to stylistics, which is the study of textual choices. Thus, if we aim to produce a text describing a dog eating a bone, it may be that we decide to characterise the dog as an active participant in this text (“The dog ate the bone”) or we may decide to background the dynamism
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of the dog in favour of a focus on the bone (“The bone was eaten by the dog”). This kind of active-passive relationship between alternative sentence pairs has been much-discussed by linguistics, including in syntactic theory (e.g. Chomsky, 1957) and in critical linguistics (e.g. Fowler, 1991, pp.77–9; Hodge and Kress, 1988), but there are many other features of textual meaning where the effects of choices can also alter the way a scene or event is presented (Jeffries, 2013).

Although they do not always explicitly present themselves in this way, the various approaches to discourse analysis (DA) that developed after the rise of Linguistics as a discipline in the early 20th century can be characterised as aiming to capture the kinds of meaning that are neither fully contextual (pragmatic) nor completely context-free (i.e. semantico-structural). With the possible exception of early versions of DA (see, for example, Brown and Yule, 1983; Coulthard, 1985), whereby the main concern is with the formal links between sentences, all other developments in describing “discourse” appear to be attempting to explain how language usage makes meaning over and above the basic propositional content but stopping short in many cases of characterising the full interpersonal and situational context.

While DA has produced a wealth of different frameworks with which to analyse text (see Alba-Juez and Juez, 2009 for an overview of some of them), none of these has so far become the default approach, though one strand of development of particular interest in the context of this handbook, usually known as CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) developed from an explicitly Marxist position specifically with the aim of exposing the fostering of unacceptable ideologies by certain textual practices (see Bloor and Bloor, 2007; Fairclough, 1995). This may be the most obviously relevant development of discourse analysis in relation to conflict communication, but it too has produced many different terminologies and a range of approaches (see, for illustration, Machin and Mayr, 2012; Wodak and Myer, 2015) which over time have become increasingly concerned with context (of production and reception) and only a few of which remain primarily text-based. My own contribution to this field comes in the form of Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010, 2015a, 2015b) whose aim has been to separate the analysis of text from the views of the analyst (i.e. it is not Marxist in essence) and also from the intended and received meaning by producer and recipient respectively. The other aim was to provide a coherent framework of textual features for researchers to employ.

There will be more discussion of the approaches used by authors of chapters in Section I of the Handbook but for now, we can note that many of the features examined by such approaches do not occur at the propositional level of lexico-grammar (plus associated context-free semantics). Rather, they use frameworks which access the background “scenery” of the text world. This includes value-laden ideologies that are taken for granted in the processing of a text and by this very mechanism have the power to influence the viewpoint of the reader, often beneath the level of conscious engagement.

1.1.3 This difficulty of identification can make ideologies hard to challenge/see

In order to discuss the problems encountered when challenging ideology in texts, I will explain examples here in terms of the critical stylistics framework. This framework is used by a number of the other chapters in Section I (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) but there are also different ways in which textual meaning can be accessed methodologically and described in theoretical terms, as we can see in chapters drawing on rhetoric (Sahlane) and on corpus methods combined with CDA (Chojnicka, Taylor and Millar). For exposition here, then,
I will use the notion of the “textual conceptual function” (TCF) from Critical Stylistics as a way to define the layer of meaning at which these features operate. What is meant by TCF is a kind of form-function pairing in which there may be a prototypical form (such as, for example, “no” and “not” in negation) which commonly identifies with the core meaning (e.g. of negation), but where there is also a range of more or less peripheral forms which may vary across the different levels of language structure (e.g. “un-” and “dis-” from morphology and “lack” and “fail” from lexis), even to the point of including body language (e.g. shaking of the head) or facial expression (e.g. turned down mouth and furrowed brow) to deliver the negated meaning.

The reason why negation (see Nahajec’s chapter), opposition (see Davies) and other TCFs (see Alaghbary) matter is that they can provide a powerful backdrop for propositional meaning. Thus, for example, the proposition of a sentence such as “We must consider X” is relatively uninteresting and simply indicates that there is something we should take note of, but whatever is chosen to fill the X slot is potentially very powerful; for example, “We must consider the terrible mess that this government has made of the National Health Service”. In this case, what gets included in a noun phrase (i.e. the phrase replacing X) is not open to question but becomes reified by its very naming. So, the reader is asked to engage with a proposition (“We must consider something”) but is not invited to question whether the implied proposition in the final noun phrase (“The government has made a mess of the National Health Service”) is in fact true. I sometimes play a short game in workshops and classes to illustrate this point. It is a version of the Victorian parlour game known as “Consequences”, and it involves writing a word at the top of a slip of paper, folding it over so that your neighbour cannot see what you have written and then passing it to them for the next word to be added. What happens, if you instruct the participants to write first a determiner, then an adjective, then a noun, followed by another noun and maybe also a prepositional phrase (each time with the paper being passed on to the next person) is that the resulting random phrases name a number of “things” that have never been named before, but which take on a fascinating existence in the minds of the class. Thus, we have encountered “that huge cat duster in the cupboard”; “my green house book on the table” and other such imaginary items. Usually, the words chosen are quite mundane and frequently concrete rather than abstract, though they can be quite bizarre, like “this furtive dream bike” or “his wooden idea hat”. Once encountered, these referents appear to exist, by the very act of naming.

This exercise demonstrates the power of naming, not just the process of choosing a particular noun from a number of options, but by also including words which pre- and post-modify it (the noun). While it is fun to play with them in this way, it underlines the more serious significance of phrases like “a form of soft war that Russia is now conducting against the west” (UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson to parliament on 6 March 2018, after the poisoning of a former Russian agent and his daughter in Salisbury). In this phrase, there is an assumption about Russian (governmental) behaviour, but it is constructed as the referent of a noun phrase, rather than as a proposition (“Russia is now conducting”, etc.). The result is that the reader/hearer is less likely or able to challenge the truth or accuracy of this assumption, because, just like the “furtive dream bike”, its existence has been established by naming it.

1.1.4 The repetition of ideologies can lead to naturalisation

Another important facet of the power of textual meaning is that however it is created (by naming, negation or some other feature), the repetition of an idea – whether ideational
(e.g. this room is hot) or ideological (e.g. Russia is the enemy) – can start to seem like common sense if it is repeated often enough. This process of an idea becoming seen as factual by repetition is known as naturalisation, and it can affect even the most educated and critical of readers/hearers. We are all susceptible to the power of repeated ideologies, such as “Women should be slim”, in texts, even if our more political selves reject them when confronted with them head-on. It is the insidious nature of the half-hidden ideology that makes it so powerful and difficult to challenge. When combined with a conflict situation, perhaps one which has been ingrained for generation after generation, this kind of textual feature may naturalise and perpetuate the attitudes that prop up the conflict itself.

In long-standing conflict situations such as Israel–Palestine or Northern Ireland, the power of naturalised ideology to produce antagonistic attitudes in each new generation is often facilitated by the kinds of textual feature discussed in the previous section. We can also see similar processes at work in local or personal conflicts where, for example, an estranged husband and wife may name each other in increasingly naturalised ways (e.g. “that mad bitch”, “that twisted bastard”) so that it is difficult to perceive or label them in any other way.

1.1.5 These processes are independent of conscious intentionality

One further general point in relation to the significance of textual meaning in conflict situations needs to be made. Of course, it is perfectly possible to see examples of explicit ideology in the propositional content of texts (e.g. “We are opposed to the deliberate ending of any innocent human life from the first moment of its existence, conception” (Pro-Life, 2018). However, the ideology in such cases is open, clear and able to be questioned or challenged directly by similarly propositional counter-arguments. What we mean by textual meaning is the kind of meaning that is brought into being behind and around the propositional meaning and which can be accessed only with significant processing effort.

There is no necessary link, however, between textual meaning of this ideological kind and deliberate obfuscation or conscious manipulation. While it is perfectly possible for competent writers and speakers to self-consciously hide or obscure their ideologies by using textual features of the kind we are discussing, it is just as likely that they honestly see the naturalised ideologies they support as being factual, and therefore not open to debate or challenge. In addition, many ideologies are the product of tacit social agreement and are not contested publicly. These feed into texts without comment and are only brought to the surface when something happens to disrupt the accepted norms of a group or of society. Thus, although deliberate manipulation and obfuscation may be of interest in particular cases, we make no theoretical linguistic distinction between them.

1.2 The kinds of conflict that involve textual meaning

In our general introduction to this volume, we discussed the nature of human conflict short of violent physical strife. Often, of course, there are both linguistic and physical manifestations of conflict, but we are concerned here with the former, which we see as a characterising all human conflict to a greater or lesser extent. In this section, I will attempt to map out the types of conflict where textual meaning (as opposed to, or in addition to interpersonal meaning) could have an effect and indicate how the same textual features may play a part in the playing out of those conflicts.
1.2.1 International conflict between states and other parties

The word “conflict” perhaps brings international conflicts most readily to mind, though disagreements can occur at any level. The issues that arise between larger entities such as states or competing groups or tribes within a state are complex and qualitatively different in many cases from smaller-scale conflicts. There may be clashes over land, natural resources, political ideologies and historical actions which seem intractable (see, for example, Ramsbotham, 2016) and many years of diplomatic and other efforts may have gone into trying to resolve them. However, there remains, at the heart of all the negotiations and debate, the use of language to engage with the warring parties and factions. Other complicating factors in the linguistics of these situations are, of course, the question of which language(s) to use in any particular circumstances (see Section III for chapters relating to this issue) and the particular register(s) that arise from international diplomacy. Neither of these sets of complications can detract, however, from the fact that in any particular communication there is a need to choose words and structures. In other words, textual meaning of the kind defined in this chapter is always present and therefore always liable to import some assumptions – which may be ideological – into the situation.

1.2.2 Regional and local conflict between groups and organisations

Many people in the world live in situations where there is tension or even outright conflict between groups within the same geographical location or administrative unit (from village to city or county). As with international conflicts, the tension may arise from competition for resources, which, for example, in cities may be space, or what a lack of space causes, such as noise pollution. There may also be overlap between this category of conflict and more personal or cultural clashes based on race, age, lifestyle and so on. In many such cases, there is no direct communication between the parties and the conflict is entirely carried on in public discourse (e.g. through the pages of local newspapers or in discussions between the members of each “side” which emphasises and naturalises the stereotyping of the perceived “enemy”). This lack of direct communication is, of course, typical too of entrenched international conflict and in both cases the result can be physical violence replacing discussion.

Language does participate in these conflicts, however, in the manner in which texts represent the (splintered) world of the conflict. This textual representation is of course always crucial to the ongoing debate. Whether in the editorial of a newspaper, the shouting match in a city street or a conversation between those of like minds aimed at strengthening the antagonism towards the other side, all these uses of language make (textual) choices and these choices create assumed meaning.

1.2.3 Institutional politics at state/region/local level

Politics at all levels has its own language habits and this is evident in the disconnect that many citizens of all countries, whether democratic or not, feel in relation to their political leaders. As with diplomacy, politics has registers and shorthand, which is usually shared by political commentators (i.e. journalists) and the politicians themselves. The public, insofar as they are interested, may also know the kind of language that is used in this arena. There is very often, however, a feeling that the language is allowing politicians and their supporters to promote ideas and policies that citizens do not like. It is, however, not straightforward to find a way to pinpoint exactly what the linguistic problem is. One answer is that everyday
words (e.g. “choice”, “respect”) take on a different kind of meaning within the political sphere and can be both a shorthand for an assumed bundle of semantic features and at the same time relatively empty of signification. This kind of socio-political keyword has been studied using a combination of corpus methods and critical stylistic analysis in news reporting of the years when Tony Blair was prime minister (Jeffries and Walker, 2017). The resulting potential for disaffection and estrangement in the electorate as a result of their suspicion that linguistic choices may be hiding ideologies exacerbates social tension and may set the scene for conflict – between political leaders and the public in this case. It may suit certain kinds of ideological positions to stir up this kind of reaction, but often it is the unintentional consequence of operating largely within the political “bubble”, and not conscious manipulation, that is at the root of the problem.

1.2.4 Personal/social/cultural politics

I have already mentioned the aspects of people’s make-up that may contribute to feelings of estrangement from those who differ from us. These include race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, education, political leanings and many more. Each of us is a complex assemblage of many such features and this only leads to tension or conflict where our lives impinge on each other or to the extent that we feel morally or socially superior to the “other”. While our identity may also cause positive engagement both with those who share and those who challenge our norms, there can be a combined effect with other pressures (e.g. shortage of resources) that leads to the “othering” of those with different identities and blaming them for the other problems. These are perhaps particularly highlighted where the identity features are most immediately evident; in skin colour, dress, language, social habits and so on. The linguistic consequences of this kind of tension or conflict may be partly in relation to language variety (e.g. we criticise a group for their language choice or their accent or dialect – see Section 1.3), but there are also textual consequences for the way that we represent such groups or the way in which we construe the world in communicating with them.

1.2.5 Personal conflict

Perhaps the most common kind of conflict in our daily lives comes in the form of personal conflict – with neighbours, family members, co-workers and so on. These conflicts can be short or long-lasting, of course, and may also descend into physical violence in extreme cases. The kinds of structural violence that are entrenched in societies where some groups have lower status by definition can, of course, mean that solutions to personal conflict are only possible by some changes at societal levels. These conflicts are also distinguished by being played out largely in face-to-face (spoken) interaction, which means that pragmatic approaches to the language involved are central (see Section II). Nevertheless, these personal conflicts are also affected by linguistic choice and that means there is always textual meaning which construes the nature of the conflict and the context in certain ways some of which may not be helpful if we want to address the underlying conflict itself.

1.3 The kinds of data that are relevant to conflict at some/all of these levels

Having taken some time to talk through the types and layers of conflict in the last section, here we try to account for the range of text-types that may be involved in any one case.
While it is tempting to think of personal conflict as mainly characterised by face-to-face spoken interaction and international conflict as being carried out in written documents and formal meetings, in fact, there is probably a great deal of personal interaction in the world of international diplomacy (note the amount of discussion of body language when leaders meet in public) and there can be quite formal language involved in personal conflict (for example once mediators or lawyers are involved). We, therefore, refrain from linking text-types to any particular kind of conflict, though some may be more likely than others in particular settings. For example, it is unlikely that newspaper stories will be written about a conflict between spouses unless this becomes so extreme that law enforcement or other authorities become involved.

There is a sense in which all and any type of language use can become involved in a conflict situation. This could range from a tweet or a personal text message to published accounts from a committee or a public speech reported on news media. In the following list, I have tried to account for the nature of the texts involved, without necessarily itemising each sub-genre or text-type there is in human interaction.

1.3.1 Parliamentary debate and official language

The ultimate example of public language, official proceedings in parliaments are usually available in print and broadcast format, sometimes live and often archived online for future viewing or searching (see, for example, the UK’s Hansard at https://hansard.parliament.uk/). This means that politicians’ words in relation to any issue, but particularly where they impinge on a conflict, are permanent and thus very powerful. The debates that politicians engage in are a very important part of the way in which the public world and social values are created and naturalised. Using a corpus-based study of parliamentary debates in the Latvian and Polish chambers, Chojnicka reflects on this process in relation to changing attitudes towards LGBT people in those countries.

1.3.2 Public texts aimed at influencing their readers

Other public text-types whose raison d’etre is to influence attitudes and present the perceived world in particular ways include any public texts (written or spoken) which are explicitly linked to the opinions, policies or attitudes of a person or group. If these texts are explicit in their espousal of particular ideological values, then this is reflected in their propositional content. Such explicit ideologies in texts may be offensive or provocative to some readers, but they are at least accessible to direct challenge. It is also common to find that ideological content is semi-concealed in such texts and this is where a linguistically sophisticated analysis is needed to understand what values are being propagated. Alaghbary investigates the textual meanings inherent in government statements by the US and Egypt on two sides of the conflict in that country and Sahlane and Davies base their analyses on the news editorial, which is also explicitly aimed at influencing the opinions of its readers.

1.3.3 Reporting/commentary/editorial/interview in mass media

The mass media is hugely influential in mediating power in modern society and the variety of genres and text-types across all the conventional media outlets is growing. The recent debates about “fake news” have been ubiquitous in response to the idea that the power of the media is its pervasiveness in promulgating inaccurate or misleading “facts”. Perhaps more
insidious, because it is more difficult to identify and challenge, are the naturalised ideologies about people or groups, based on repeated assumptions, that can lead to prejudice and hatred. The ways in which migrants are represented (infesting, flooding, etc.) is just one recent example of this process. Taylor considers changing reporting of migration over time in the *The Times*.

### 1.3.4 Social media engagement/debate/argument with current issues

The public has a stronger voice these days, largely thanks to social media. While superficially positive, this change in public debate – and the means by which it is carried on – has also led to a blurring of the lines between public and private communication. In itself, this is not problematic, but it can lead to a naturalisation of some very unappealing ideologies which might otherwise have only been expressed in private. The rise in the apparent acceptability of racist, sexist, homophobic and other prejudiced views is partly defended by appeals to “free speech” without a nuanced understanding of what that precious ideal really means in practice in our highly connected world. It is clear that the use of social media to “other”, to bully and to whip up hatred is growing and causing more conflict in the world. Millar approaches this topic by looking at the meta-language used in legal and quasi-legal texts and considers how terms like “hate speech” themselves are defined.

### 1.3.5 Mediated conversations/negotiations between individuals/groups

One of the types of communication event that is perhaps specific to conflict is the mediated conversation. Whether it is a teacher or parent trying to make two children settle their differences; a community mediator helping two sets of neighbours to come to some kind of peace or an international negotiator trying to find common ground between warring parties, these communications are marked by the presence of a “third” party who is officially neutral in relation to the cause of the conflict. The interactive aspects of this kind of communication (who speaks when; what are the “rules” for turn-taking, etc.) are clearly specialised but the textual meaning is the same as in all other communication and can be analysed for the same partially hidden or assumed ideologies. There has been some work on mediated communication in conflict (Stokoe and Sikveland, 2016), but there is a great deal more to do. Although mediation does not feature in this section, Maxwell and Tipton, both in Section IV, discuss communicative aspects of this kind of situation; the metaphors used – and useful – in mediation (Maxwell) and the issues that arise for interpreters in conflict communication, who are presented with many of the same challenges as mediators, though the roles are officially distinct.

### 1.3.6 Conversational data: between individuals/groups

It should be clear by now that the textual choices made by language producers, in all situations, are subject to the same kinds of ideational processes and that some of these can go beyond ideation to reflecting values (ideologies) of the text producer, whether conscious or not. When two people or groups are involved in a slanging match or a frosty conversation or a continued argument over several episodes there are many features of language that will be prominent, most of them aspects of the interaction itself and affected in many cases by the wider situation and social context (see Sections II–IV). Nevertheless, since there are still words, phrases and sentences being used, these will reflect the worldview and opinions
of the participants. Textual meaning is therefore threaded through all language use, and all conflictual communication, whatever the circumstances. Nahajec (see Chapter 4) looks at the textual choices made in a particular kind of one-to-one interaction, which has potential for conflict, the political interview.

1.4 The approaches available to researchers

Depending on the specific research question being addressed, there are a range of options for researching the textual aspects of communication in conflict situations. The data can be used inductively, whereby a research question is asked and data collected which is then systematically analysed to answer the question. This data may be corpus-based (see Chapters 6, 7 and 8) or use smaller amounts of specific data analysed qualitatively (see Chapter 5). Other approaches seen in this section may be seen as more deductive, testing a hypothesis or proposing a theoretical refinement by searching for cases which confirm or challenge the hypothesis/proposal (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4). In these latter cases, the rigour in the research process is partly in the structure of its argument, complemented by the explanatory and illustrative examples from data sought out to test the ideas.

1.5 Introducing the chapters in Section I

This chapter has laid the background for the following chapters, which range over the conflict levels, text-types and approaches discussed above. There are, of course, many permutations that are not represented here, but these chapters are indicative of the scope for much more work in this field, as well as demonstrating that much work already completed in CDA, Critical Stylistics and Corpus Linguistics (as well as combinations of these) is relevant to conflict, whether or not it has presented itself in this way.

In Chapter 2, Sahlane uses argumentation theory and analysis based on rhetorical frameworks to examine op-ed press items (editorials and other opinion pieces) covering the prelude to the 2003 Iraq War. Sahlane critiques the fallacious use of argumentation strategies in this data that are not wrong in themselves but are “dangerously prone to abuse”. The following three chapters (3–5) are based on a critical stylistic view of textual meaning. Davies argues that news discourse is partly responsible for creating conflict through its exaggeration of the binary. His data comes from editorials used during the UK’s general election campaigns of 2010 and 2015 and his focus is on a single TCF, that of constructed opposition. Nahajec considers the textual practice of another TCF, negation, and its effect in conflict situations. Using examples from political interviews, she argues that there are three ways that negation can contribute to conflict: i) in enacting conflict between speakers; ii) in representing people and ideas; and iii) in heightening fears and tensions in conflict contexts. Alaghbary takes a broader Critical Stylistic view of two conflicting statements on the removal from office of President Morsy of Egypt. The statements are from US President Obama and the Egyptian Supreme Council of Armed Forces. Alaghbary considers the role of language in naturalising ideologies and the difference between categorical statements from the military government and Obama’s modalised or provisional “truth”.

The remaining chapters in this section (6–8) approach their topics through (critical) discourse approaches combined with corpus methods. Chojincka examines the construction of ideological views of homosexuality in Latvian and Polish parliamentary debates from 1994 to 2013. The chapter considers the structural violence which arises from representation leading to the normalisation of negative ideologies characterising homosexuality. Changes in
parliamentary references/discussion over time are examined and the tendency to connect homosexuality with Leftist politics (by the Right) is critiqued. Taylor examines the naming practices of reporting on forced migration in The Times newspaper. In particular, the naming of the participants in the process of forced migration is shown to have potentially damaging consequences for the people forced from their homes. Finally, Millar takes a slightly different stance, examining official documents and legal discussion to see how the phenomenon of “Hate speech” is defined and used. She shows that although popular in political policymaking and speeches, the term is not used in laws themselves. She also demonstrates the power of a term (which has no agreed definition) to become reified through naming in conflicts at different (geographical/political) levels from global to national.

1.6 What we might gain from textual analysis of conflict-related text

It may already be evident that careful and systematic scrutiny of the language used in or related to conflict can demonstrate where prejudices arise, how stereotypes are naturalised and when opinions are entrenched. However, it is perhaps worth finishing this chapter with some suggestions as to how raising awareness of textual meaning could be of value in a society aiming to minimise conflict at all levels.

First, taking time to demonstrate how ideologically loaded text and argumentation work can help to raise the levels of critical language awareness in the general population. Although all human beings, including text linguists, can be carried away by emotive reactions to texts at times, there is scope for all of us to learn to react less instinctively and find a more measured way to counter the ideological assumptions being made in the texts we encounter.

Second, there is potential for adaptation amongst those involved in conflict to adapt their own linguistic behaviour or at the least be able to analyse what kinds of textual meaning they have created in their language use. This kind of self-awareness, informed by linguistic knowledge, would take time to develop into more automatic behavioural traits, but is not impossible to achieve, it seems to us.

Finally, perhaps the best and most achievable outcome from an increased awareness of the effects of our textual choices would be an improved level of public (and private) debate in which people can respond to assumed ideologies by challenging them directly and recognising their own naturalised assumptions for what they are. Politicians already have some ability in this regard, but it earns them only a reputation for avoiding answering questions. To be fair to them, that is usually because the questions they face contain traps created by the very textual features that this chapter has been discussing.

References


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[Accessed 3 June 2018.]