

The M.A.K. Halliday Library Functional Linguistics Series

Annabelle Lukin

# War and Its Ideologies

A Social-Semiotic Theory and  
Description

 Springer

# **The M.A.K. Halliday Library Functional Linguistics Series**

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This series focuses on studies concerning the theory and application of Systemic Functional Linguistics. It bears the name of Professor M.A.K. Halliday, as he is generally regarded as the founder of this school of linguistic thought. The series covers studies on language and context, functional grammar, semantic variation, discourse analysis, multimodality, register and genre analysis, educational linguistics and other areas. Systemic Functional Linguistics is a functional model of language inspired by the work of linguists such as Saussure, Hjelmslev, Whorf, and Firth. The theory was initially developed by Professor M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues in London during the 1960s, and since 1974 it has held an international congress every year at various continents around the world. It is well-known for its application in a variety of fields, including education, translation, computational linguistics, multimodal studies, and healthcare, and scholars are always exploring new areas of application.

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# War and Its Ideologies

A Social-Semiotic Theory and Description

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*To David – my existential fabric.*

# Preface

*It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.*

Voltaire

*The language we use about war is inappropriate, and its inappropriateness is designed to conceal a reality so odious that we do not wish to know it.*

Aldous Huxley

When the USA, Britain and Australia invaded Iraq in 2003, I was preparing my PhD graduation speech. After three and a half years as a PhD student in linguistics, I heard the belligerence of elected officials in America, Britain and my own country, Australia – the “Coalition of the Willing” – through ears fundamentally changed by reading linguistics. In a discipline much misunderstood, and fiercely fractured, my corner of linguistics is focussed on the study of meaning in society and culture. The scholars I read through my PhD – some of them dead decades ago, although one of them, then in his late 70s, marched with me against the invasion of Iraq in downtown Sydney (as he had against the Korean War in the 1950s) – were striving to give language its rightful place in our understanding of what it means to be human. For these scholars, language is part and parcel of the human condition, the product of humans being and living together over many thousands of years. Language, as the British linguist J.R. Firth observed, is the nervous system of society.

Now language was being used, again, to defend the extreme acts of violence which are an integral part of war. It was being recruited, as it had been so many times over its history, to legitimate this violence: to construe it as an act of last resort, as a necessary means to a better future, as rationally planned and managed, as legal, as – astonishingly – the only means for achieving peace. And language was ready and able, if not willing. Language, Ruqaiya Hasan argues, is not wilful: it can serve all and any ideology. Having been recruited by warmongers so many times before, language has a long history as an unwitting accomplice to those defending and rationalising their use of violence. Once again, language was ready with its words and structures, with its meanings and its crucial nuances, to work its magic for those directing the 2003 invasion of Iraq and profiting from it. As I watched the

war on nightly news, the need to understand this magical power of language and its role in normalising this most extreme form of concerted human action became more insistent. Its role, I now realised, was both absolutely essential and largely covert. Language had the power to make the deadly violence of the world's great super-power – in principle now much more visible than ever before to a distant audience – appear necessary, reasoned, strategic and heroic.

For some time, ideology has been a topic of interest in linguistics, including in its role in the prosecution of war. Chilton and others wrote on the nuclear arms debate in the mid-1980s, while Chomsky, with Herman, in the best-selling book *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), considered the discourse associated with the Indochina Wars (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), though notably without using a single concept or tool from linguistics. Another prominent American linguist, George Lakoff, wrote a public essay at the time of the First Gulf War, recruiting his conceptual metaphor theory to explaining “the metaphor system” being used to justify the war. And scholars within the critical linguistics tradition, and later critical discourse analysis, have since the 1970s drawn on various linguistic paradigms to study the language of the powerful. Much of this work has focussed on the partial analysis of ideological patterns in particular texts, while explicitly eschewing theoretical questions about the relationship of language and ideology. Alternatively, it avoided any linguistic theory (in Chomsky's case) or applied one particular theory (e.g. conceptual metaphor theory in Lakoff's case, or pragmatics in the case of a more recent study by Verschueren) without explaining why one particular theory should be chosen rather than another.

I wanted to understand why language was so central to ideology. Here were two interrelated, but distinct, phenomena. What was the nature of their relation? Was language always, or only sometimes, ideological? Were there features of language that could help explain the power of ideology? If language was always part of legitimating war, could linguistics help us understand how humans live with contradictory views about violence? What could language tell us about the nature of ideology, and what could ideology show us about the power of language? Could the problem of ideology be a test case for the efficacy and value of linguistics as a discipline? These were my questions about language, linguistics and ideology, provoked by living through yet another war which my government was busy helping prosecute and legitimate.

This book was written trying to answer these questions. Language *is* always ideological, as the Russian linguist, Vološinov, argued back in the 1920s. This fact of language means linguistic theories are also ideologies: they are ideologies about how to look at language. They vary in what they take language to be, and so, by extension, they vary in how they conceptualise the relationship between language and ideology. Some linguistic ideas are better suited than others to explain the power of language. Paradoxically, despite his long-time interest in power and American imperialism, Chomsky's theory of universal grammar has nothing at all to offer on the topic. Language for Chomsky is a passive substance and propaganda a “misuse” of it. The purported creative power of grammar for Chomsky excludes the power to generate ideologies. It is instead merely the power to generate syntactic

strings, strings that bear no relation to the functions language serves in the lives of its users. In the most recent articulation of his theory – a defence of recursion as the only element of an innate grammatical faculty – the problem of ideology continues to be entirely outside the remit of Chomsky’s linguistics.

I have tried in this book to find the concepts from linguistics that are useful for understanding ideology in theoretical terms as well as for the analysis of specific ideologies. Although concepts are drawn from a number of scholars, I give particular attention to the work of Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan because they recognise the intimate, bidirectional relation between language and society. Borrowing from Greimas, Halliday developed the concept of language as a “social semiotic” to explain the integration of language with other social phenomena. Language, Halliday argues, is “not something separate from humanity, but an essential part of the condition of being human”. Humans talk both to each other and to ourselves, and through these processes “we construct the microcosmos in which each one of us lives, our little universes of doing and happening, and the people and the things that are involved therein”. For Halliday, the very inner structure of language is an ideological interpretant built into language.

Halliday’s general framework of language as a social semiotic is, I argue, the linguistic theory most sensitive to the properties of language that make it ideology’s closest co-conspirator. Any theory of ideology requires a position on the relations between the world “out there” and the meanings in our minds. But the separation of “the material” from ideas, culture, or meanings is a false one. For Halliday, “all human processes, however they are manifested, whether in our consciousness, our material frames, or in the physical world around us, are the outcome of forces that are both material and semiotic at the same time”. Material and semiotic phenomena are interdependent, because “meaning needs matter to realize it”, while “matter needs meaning to organize it”. This interdependence explains why the inner structure of language is so deeply connected to human experience and why language and ideology permeate all facets of life.

A central concept in Halliday’s explanation of the evolution of language is “register”. Every instance of language use shapes and is shaped by the social context in which it operates. Though all language use is ideological, some registers, because of the status and nature of their interactants, are more open than others to ideological contestation. As Malešević argues, since power is asymmetrical, “language games” are not all equal. In this study, the primary data are news reports on the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the USA, Britain and Australia. I discuss the specific registerial features of news and the particular ideological potential of this register. Data are drawn from various media sources in the West, Asia and the Middle East, though I give particular attention to Australia’s public broadcaster, the ABC.

The data provide an empirical basis to test claims about the work of language in the legitimization of war. Real language data, however, raise both theoretical and methodological questions about how ideologies manifest. Corpus linguistics has developed a suite of techniques that allow analysts to track lexical frequencies, keywords and collocations across large data sets. Ideological reproduction requires the reiteration of linguistic patterns, and corpus linguistics enables us to reveal some of

the collective linguistic behaviours through which habits of talk and mind are formed and maintained. But the linguistic patterns generated by ideologies are not only found in lexical frequencies, keywords and collocations. To bring ideological patterning to light requires meticulous attention to the complex lexicogrammatical patterning woven in and through the text-in-context ensemble. Hasan describes ideology as “orderly variation in constellations of semantic features” and argues that ideologies produce semantic clusters, in something akin to Whorf’s concept of a “configurative rapport”. Such clusters have a nucleus, in which some semantic feature “acts as a pivot, attracting other semantic features”. Predicated on contextual presuppositions, the nucleus attracts certain lexicogrammatical, and therefore semantic, features, while keeping other kinds of patterns at a distance. In this book, I show that the lexical item *war* itself acts as a strong lexical and semantic node. This node comes with contextual presuppositions and implications which set the terms of what, semantically, will go with war and what will not. These patterns reveal how we collectively use language to legitimate war, at the same time that we are free to use language to condemn and stigmatise violence. Language is big enough to allow two distinct parallel processes: one in which war is not only legitimated but celebrated, even venerated, and another, in which violence is abhorred, denounced and punished. And like parallel lines, these two semantic processes are equidistant at all points, and never – or almost never – converge.

The book explores these parallel processes, combining corpus-based analysis of large data sets with detailed manual text analysis of whole texts. But the question of why we find these linguistic patterns, when the linguistic system is vast and open, offering its speakers infinite combinatorial options, requires the perspective of what Malinowski called the context of culture. And here linguistics must be in dialogue with other disciplines. While looking for another book in my library, I had the fortune to stumble across Siniša Malešević’s *Sociology of War and Violence*, an account of the role of collective violence and war in the shaping of much of recorded human history. “Organised violence”, Malešević argues, was decisive in the formation of modernity, such that “modernity as we know it would be unthinkable without organised violence”. Our dependence on collective violence has produced what he has called an “ontological dissonance”, a profound contradiction between our collective abhorrence of violence and our reliance on it for our modes of social organisation:

Couched in the language of justice, equality and fraternity and underpinned by a monopoly on “truth”, modern ideological narratives are adept at legitimising and squaring what initially might seem impossible: to guillotine thousands of French revolutionaries in the name of human liberty, to send millions of Soviet workers to gulags while advocating proletarian egalitarianism, to drop nuclear bombs on hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians in the name of liberal democracy, or to kill thousands of fellow Muslims while preaching the universal brotherhood of *umma* as in contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iraq. While an individual human life is sacred in principle, no price is too high when ideological goals are at stake: killing hundreds of thousands of human beings becomes “regrettable” but acceptable when “safeguarding democracy”, “attaining or fighting communism”, “establishing our own sovereign and independent nation”, “creating an ethnically or racially pure society”, or setting up a Sharia-based, pan-Islamic caliphate.

This paradox, once visible, can be everywhere observed. It is even enshrined in international law. Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter deals with “Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace and Acts of Aggression”. In this chapter, Article 39 gives the Security Council the authority to determine the existence of any such threats, breaches or acts. Once the existence of such a threat, breach or act is determined, Article 40 gives the council authority to rule that the relevant parties comply with such “provisional measures” as it deems necessary. Article 41 gives authority to the council to decide on measures “not involving the use of armed force” in order to give effect to its provisions. Finally, Article 42 allows for “such action by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security”. Such action, Article 42 continues, “may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations”. Under “other operations”, member nations are entitled to deploy all the lethal technology at their disposal (other than that outlawed already, such as in the 1925 Geneva Convention). An illegal act of aggression can be remedied by legal acts of violence, according to the clauses in international law most central to such determinations. Even at the heart of international law, we find the ontological dissonance described by Malešević. Violence is “peace enforcement”.

In one and the same sentence, language obscures the gaping contradictions: “aggression” is condemned, while “other operations” are rationalised. It is linguistic technology that creates and maintains these distinct classifications – power acts through discourse to create strongly distinct orientations to phenomena that are otherwise difficult to tell apart, as described in Bernstein’s sociological account of cultural reproduction. To do this, what language creates is not simply a “piling up of lexations” (to quote Whorf): it is, instead, an “existential fabric”, a term coined by David Butt. Ideology is forceful because it is maintained, not by words here and there, but by seamless realities that are language-dependent. An “existential fabric” – Durkheim’s “collective conscience” – has a life of its own:

once constituted ... without freeing itself from the source whence it flows and whence it continues to draw its sustenance, it nevertheless becomes an autonomous factor in social life, capable of spontaneously producing its own movements without external impulsion, precisely because of the supremacy it has acquired.

There has been a problematic split in work on ideology, with much of the theoretical work avoiding empirical studies, while the empirical work has avoided theoretical problems. The outline of this book reflects my commitment both to the theoretical issues around the relations of language and ideology and to perhaps the greatest ideological problem of our time, our ongoing deference to war despite its devastating consequences. The first three chapters of the book are largely theoretical. Chapter 1 explores a sociological thesis about the interrelations of war and social organisation (drawing largely on Malešević’s account), summarises the linguistic work on ideology and sets out the dimensions of the data and methods. Chapter 2 presents some key ideas from linguistics which develop the necessary theoretical orientation to be able to see the interpenetration of language and ideology.

The relevant work of two scholars outside of linguistics is also discussed: Malinowski and Bernstein. In Chap. 3, I ask what language must be like if it is our greatest source of ideological power. On this question, it is Halliday's account of the semi-otic "big bang" – the process through which language became a multidimensional semiotic system with realisational, stratificational and metafunctional complexity as its defining features – that is central to fully understanding the ideological power of language and, by extension, the power of ideology.

Readers who prefer to deal directly with the empirical demonstration of these theoretical issues should begin at Chap. 4, which explores two key lexical nodes – *war* and *violence*. The chapter shows contrasting definitions, thesaurus locations, frequencies and collocations of these items, which make visible some of the means by which these terms are kept distinct. Chapters 5 and 6 explore two single texts, which construe events early in the 2003 invasion of Iraq from distinct points of view, the first as part of a *war* and the second as terrible acts of *violence*. Chapter 7 provides another vista on the semantics of war, by examining a corpus of news reports on the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The chapter provides a perspective between the large-scale analysis of specific lexical items in Chap. 4 and the very detailed analysis of single texts in Chaps. 5 and 6. It shows the complex inter-rank and cross-metafunctional insulation of war from its human agents and its terrible destructiveness. It is my hope that these empirical studies will make more visible the constellations of linguistic patterns on which rests the ontological dissonance which, as Malešević argues, is right at the heart of the modern age. Chapter 8 concludes the book, by asking whether the "existential fabric" we have collectively woven to make war legitimate can ever be undone.

Sydney, Australia

Annabelle Lukin

# Acknowledgements

Throughout my work and study in linguistics, I have had the benefit of proximity to genuine scholars, whose intellectual journeys were never determined by climbing institutional ladders or seeking fame or influence.

My first debt is to Michael Halliday, who bequeathed to linguistics a portrait of language both panoptic and finely textured. As he “wandered the highways and byways of language”, Halliday sought to understand, simply, how language works. His interest was always in “what other people wanted to know about language, whether scholars in other fields or those with practical problems to be faced and solved”. Halliday’s profound insights into the problem of ideology have been passed over by many scholars who thought there was some shorter route to making sense of the power of language. I hope I have been able to do his ideas some justice in this monograph.

Ruqaiya Hasan understood more than any other linguist the demands that the problem of ideology put on the discipline of linguistics. Rather than simply trying to use linguistics to analyse particular examples of ideologies, she wanted to understand what ideology shows us about the nature of language and what the organisation of language tells us about the nature of ideology. Just weeks before she received her terminal diagnosis, she had agreed to work with me on this book. I think she might have liked it: she certainly would have seen even more flaws in it than are obvious to its mother.

I have had the benefit over many years of conversations with Geoff Williams, David Butt, Christian Matthiessen, Alison Moore and Rosemary Huisman. My research students have all given me significant opportunities to develop my understanding of language.

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I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to attend workshops at my own university offered by leading scholars in corpus linguistics, including Tony McEnery, Paul Baker, Vaclav Brezina and Dana Gablasova. The research for Chap. 4 was inspired by their visit to Macquarie in 2015. They have generously responded to various follow-up queries. My former PhD student, Alex Garcia, was instrumental in helping me see how to combine corpus techniques with close textual analysis. Her brilliant but depressing study illuminates the relationship between media reporting and the widespread but incorrect belief that the lion's share of the violence in Colombia is perpetrated by guerrilla, not paramilitary, organisations.

The invitation from Professor Alex Peng to deliver the inaugural Halliday-Hasan Lecture Series at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in December 2015 gave me the opportunity to present and test out many of the theoretical ideas that are now in this book. My trip was funded by the Halliday-Hasan International Fund for the Study of Language and Other Systems of Meaning.

It has been a privilege to discover and absorb the work of Siniša Malešević, Professor of Sociology at University College, Dublin. Professor Malešević's account of the nexus between war, ideology and social organisation enabled me see a coherence across a variety of linguistic patterns which were emerging from my analysis. I greatly appreciate him making time to comment on drafts of Chaps. 1 and 4.

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The research for this book began during a postdoctoral fellowship awarded to me by Macquarie University in 2005. When I secured an academic role in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University in 2006, Professor Jim Piper agreed to allow me to continue the fellowship part-time until its expiry. This was a beautiful act of counter-bureaucracy, without which I would never have been able to make sense of the linguistic correlates of the "ontological dissonance" Professor Malešević has so eloquently described. Two subsequent periods of study leave granted by Macquarie University enabled the overall conceptualisation of the book and the time to write, revise and edit the manuscript.

Thanks to my nephew Oscar for helping me work out the title for the book.

And finally, thanks Mum: for giving me the social conscience and curiosity that is truly the foundation for everything in the book.

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# Chapter 1

## Language, Linguistics and Ideology



*The illusion of the powerlessness of language in construing reality, quite paradoxically, becomes the greatest source of its power: it becomes the most powerful instrument for the maintenance of ideology.*

Ruqaiya Hasan (1988)

### 1.1 Introduction: Ideology, War, and Violence

After a period out of academic fashion, when it was declared dead or having never existed, the concept of ideology has returned to the toolbox of the social sciences. In a testament to its insistence, ideology, despite the difficulties of defining it theoretically and the complexity of observing it empirically, just will not be ignored. Understanding human behaviour demands a conception of ideology, or one of its many close relatives, such as worldview, subjectivity, false consciousness, collective conscience, discursive formation, zeitgeist, mental model, epistemology, meta-narrative, habitus, or coding orientation. We cannot seem to escape what the sociologist Karl Mannheim called “the alarming fact” that “the same world can appear differently to different observers” (Mannheim 1936, 5). Moreover, the problem of ideology – the power and place of meaning in how humans behave and organize our ways of living – is central to many disciplines. The topic is most typically associated with sociology and critical theory, and there are very few major social and political theorists who have not developed some account of ideology, even if only in a rudimentary fashion (Malešević and MacKenzie 2002, 3).

It is a sign of its importance that it has attracted so much scholarly attention: the literature over the past 200 years on the topic of ideology is vast, and usefully summarized in various publications (see e.g. McLellan 1986). But because this concept invokes the continuity between the world inside us and the world around us, ideology goes beyond these disciplines. The complexity of human behaviour demands the recognition that our inner worlds are shaped by, and shape, the worlds outside

us. As Firth famously said, we don't just live in a bag of skin. In a measure of its interdisciplinary reach, the concept of ideology has even taken its place in the field of psychiatry. In 2006, Yale Professor of Psychiatry, Bruce Wexler, published a book titled *Brain and Culture* with the subtitle *Neurobiology, Ideology and Social Change* (Wexler 2006). Wexler's interdisciplinary account begins by recognizing that humans, out of all animal species, developmentally have the longest period during which our brains are shaped by the environment. Our brains require extended sensory input to develop physically, and the functional and structural organization of the human brain is "strongly influenced" by the nature of the stimuli we receive (Wexler 2006). High levels of plasticity in the relation of structure and function in the brain persist for some years, with the region of the brain most distinctively human continuing to mature into the third decade of life. The human brain needs more and longer-term external stimulation from the environment to develop than that of any other animal species. At the same time that our brains develop over a longer term through environmental stimulus, we also alter the environment around us to a degree "without precedent" among animals (Wexler 2006, 3). Thus, the environments from which the necessary stimuli come are more and more likely to be wholly human, cultural constructs. Socialization is, Wexler argues, "the transgenerational shaping of brain function through culture" (Wexler 2006, 4).

Over the trajectory of our individual lives, there is an inverse relation between learning and acting: we learn most when we are unable to change our environment, and by the time we are able to change our environment, our openness to the world is tempered by the weight of our accumulated experience. Thus, until early adulthood, "the highly malleable inner world is shaped by the external world", while for "the remainder of life, the individual largely acts to alter the external world to match an increasingly inflexible inner world" (Wexler 2006, 143). Modern neuroscience, according to Wexler, confirms the argument of the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, about the relationship between culture and the nervous system. Writing in the 1970s, Geertz argued that the human nervous system is not simply available and able to acquire culture, but positively demands the input of culture for it to be functional. The brain, "having arisen within the framework of human culture, would not be viable outside of it" (Geertz 1973, 68).

For an illustration of how deeply contingent human thinking and behaviour is, Wexler reaches back over 800 years to the Crusades, "a 200 year series of largely suicidal expeditions of more than half a million European men, women and children to a destination halfway around the known world" (Wexler 2006, 215–16). Wexler argues that "there are few more remarkable ideological expressions" than the Crusades. From the distance of the twenty-first century, it is easy to feel shocked by the manner in which so many ordinary people could have been moved to risk their lives and livelihoods to journey to an entirely unknown place, to fight an almost imaginary adversary. Distance in time is one of the most powerful agents for the deconstruction of an ideology. But are the Crusades really so remarkable? Closer to our time, the scale on which twentieth century governments and populations mobilised for the purposes of collective violence dwarves the adventures of medieval

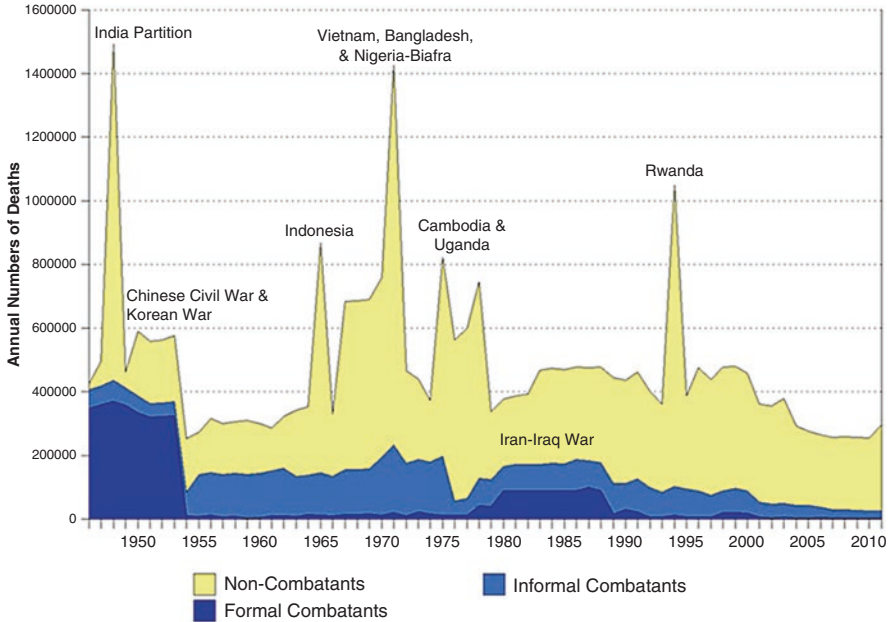
Christian crusaders. Over the twentieth century, industrialized warfare produced well over 110 million deaths directly caused by war, and up to a further 200 million deaths due to “war-induced starvation, disease, malnutrition, long term wounds, rebellions and exhaustion” (Malešević 2010, 119).

In a quantitative study of war from 3000 BC up to the contemporary period, Eckhardt (Eckhardt 1992) shows the figures of the twentieth century to be a logical outcome of the accumulating levels of organised violence over the second millennium of the current era. Going back to the tenth and eleventh centuries, the combined death toll from war is estimated to have been around 60,000 deaths. The following two centuries witnessed a dramatic increase in war casualties, to 539,000. This figure then more than doubled (to 1,379,000) for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, before undergoing a sixfold increase to 7,721,000 over the following 200 years. By the nineteenth century, the figure is 19 million, rising to a staggering 111 million for the twentieth century (Eckhardt 1992). On these estimates, the last three centuries account for 90% of all deaths in war since its emergence around 3000 BCE, with the twentieth century being “nothing short of a century of death” (Malešević 2010, 119, 120).

Given the scale of deaths in war in the twentieth century, it is perhaps not surprising that in the twenty-first century – indeed in the whole post-Second World War period – deaths in armed conflict have declined. Figure 1.1, from the Center for Systemic Peace,<sup>1</sup> shows estimated annual deaths (per million head of population) as a consequence of political violence from 1946 to 2011. In 1946, deaths per million were 215; in 2011 they were down sixfold, to 35 per million. As Fig. 1.1 indicates, the overall numbers towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century are also in decline, and the most recent spike in numbers of violent deaths (the 1994 genocide in Rwanda) is now more than 20 years behind us. But while death in the context of wars has declined, the number of conflicts appears to be increasing. The percentage of states experiencing warfare, down from a peak of 30% in the mid-1990s to 13% in 2010, was back up to 17% in 2016. The Global Peace Index report for 2017 (<http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/06/GPI17-Report.pdf>) reports an overall downward trend over the last decade on their measures of global peace: the measures of global peacefulness are in decline. And in some of the recent and ongoing conflicts, such as the wars in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, the numbers of civilian deaths are truly shocking. With modern social media, anyone can access video and still images of these terrible wars, including photos of dead or profoundly suffering children. These contemporary conflicts exemplify twenty-first century modes of warfare, where organised violence has transformed from mass armies and mass mobilizations to “more selective and clinical use of extreme forms of violence”, afforded by “highly advanced military technologies, worldwide organisational reach and a great deal of popular justification at home” (Malešević 2017, 310). Organised violence remains a legitimate form of political action, despite the devastating consequences for the communities who suffer it, and those delegated to prosecute it.

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<sup>1</sup> See Global Conflict Trends 2017 report, at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/index.html>



**Fig. 1.1** Estimated annual deaths from political violence 1946–2011 (Center for Systemic Peace Studies 2017)

## 1.2 A Sociological Account of War and Violence

Why is war so enduring? Why has it flourished most in the modern period, when individual freedoms have never been more championed, equality never more prized, and violence never more proscribed and condemned? As ideologies around universal human rights have become widespread, we have developed our most sophisticated machinery – both technological and organizational – for the large-scale slaughter of our fellow human beings. This contradiction between our humanist values and our militarist methods are so extreme that Malešević has described it as “ontological dissonance”, to capture the scale of this paradox which, he argues, is found “at the very heart of the modern era” (Malešević 2010, 118). To explain this dissonance, Malešević gives a special role to ideology. Ideology, he argues, “took and still takes central stage in this process of interpreting and justifying something that seems so absurd and irreconcilable” (Malešević 2010, 10). Ideology is “a cornerstone of everyday life, not just for the main perpetrators of violence, such as the social organisations and their leaders, but also for the ordinary citizens who all wish to feel comfortable that their struggle has a just cause and the use of violence against the monstrous enemy is nothing more than a necessary evil” (Malešević 2010, 10).

However, the scale and pervasiveness of violence in the modern period is not explained by ideology alone. Malešević argues that war, far from being an aberration in human societies, is ever present, because it has been the prime mover in the

rise and evolution of our forms of social organization. The structure of modern societies has come about through what he has called, drawing on Weber, “the cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion”, a process that emerges with the rise of warfare. Warfare “gave birth to, and consequently depended on the existence of large-scale social organizations” (Malešević 2010, 6). As such, war and organised violence have shaped much of recorded human history, and have been “decisive components in the formation of the modern social order” (Malešević 2010, 3–4). The penetration of war into the fabric of human societies is so profound that it has played a large part in phenomena as disparate as the development of modern banking systems, the width of European boulevards, the rise of the welfare state, and feminism (Malešević 2010; Roth 2009). Organised violence has, over some 5000 years, been in constant and mutual inter-relation with the emergence of more and more complex, hierarchical, large-scale social organizations. Malešević’s term “cumulative bureaucratisation of coercion” captures two features of this process. The process is bureaucratic because “it entails ever-expanding bureaucratic rationalization in the Weberian sense”, so that violence comes to be seen as “nothing more than a rational (or in a given context most rational) means to an end”; and it is coercive “since it involves not only the control and employment of violence and the waging of wars but it is also able to internally pacify social order by establishing the monopolistic threat on the use of violence” (Malešević 2010, 7, 129).

The development in the modern period of ever-more sophisticated social, organizational, and technological machinery of war, Malešević argues, both produces and requires “continuous ideological legitimization” (Malešević 2010, 7). In other words, the cumulative bureaucratization of coercion has both brought about and demanded more complex symbolic resources. Modern ideologies about war and violence have the task of creating and supporting “modern, self-reflexive beings, socialized in an environment that abhors the sacrifice of human life” who can “nonetheless tolerate and often tacitly support murder on a massive scale” (Malešević 2010, 79). These ideologies must reconcile “inclusion with exclusion, fairness with discrimination, equity with bigotry, and universalist humanist ethical principles with the mass slaughter of other human beings” (Malešević 2010, 83). The intricacy and reach of this ideological work is such that Malešević coins the term “centrifugal (mass-scale) ideologisation” to describe it. “Centrifugal ideologisation” captures the process of ideologies radiating out from social organizations, including the state, social movements, religious institutions, and the military. The rise of the mass media, widespread literacy, and ever-widening enfranchisement of the public have produced a public landscape subject to the flux and flow of ideologies. But despite the “centrifugal” metaphor, this process is not monolithic or one-way. Ideologies are both deeply connected to our day-to-day habits of living, and at the same time enable us to transcend them. Ideologies come out of “slowly evolving structural changes” and resonate with local meanings (Malešević 2017, 42, 58ff). Ideologies cannot, as Malešević argues, “work *ex nihilo*” (Malešević 2002, 91). Ideologisation is a dialectic process, as argued by Vološinov:

the ideological sign must immerse itself in the element of the inner subjective signs; it must ring with subjective tones in order to remain a living sign and not be relegated to the honorary status of an incomprehensible museum piece (Vološinov 1973).

In the face of the killing and devastation that war always entails, how do we continually renew its legitimacy? How do we keep the faith, at one and same time that we regularly, loudly and rightly condemn the violence of others? How do the same people stigmatize some acts of killing, while they glorify others? “Ideology” is only the short answer. If ideology plays a critical role in holding this contradictory, cacophonous mix of human actions together, then language must also be at the heart of our ontological dissonance. Ideology enables us to reconcile this profound paradox, which suggests that language has a power beyond what even most scholars of language have imagined.

The power of language is hardly a new topic – indeed, the persuasive power of language has long been recognised. The two and a half thousand year old Bisitun inscriptions in Iran, proclaiming the victories of the Persian King, Darius, are considered by some historians to be an early example of the use of propaganda (Nagle and Burstein 2009, 133). Classicist Tom Holland suggests that this act of self-promotion by the Persian King had a particular new quality and potency about it. The inscriptions eschew the details of battles won in favour of higher claims by King Darius to have “fought on the side of ‘Truth’” and “rescued the world from evil” (Holland 2005, 32, 54). Darius’s vision was “a fusion of cosmic, moral and political order”, which provided an imperial kind of propaganda, one that “serve[d] very effectively to justify global conquest without limit” (Holland 2010, 19). At around the same time as the inscriptions of Bisitun, in politics in Greece and China we begin to see conscious reflection on the persuasive and political power of rhetoric (Connolly 2009; Lu 1998).

However, Malešević argues that, in modernity, ideology has a new kind of power. The modern age “is the true cradle of fully fledged ideologies, and the ongoing process of centrifugal ideologisation” (Malešević 2010, 9). He writes:

Whereas traditional rulers made extensive use of the legitimising potency of proto-ideologies, such as religion and mythology, to justify conquests and coercive forms of governance, it is really modernity that requires and provides a really elaborate and full justification of violent action (Malešević 2010, 9).

Malešević suggests three reasons why modernity is the age of ideology. First of all, the changes associated with modernity, such as the rise of the nation state, the spread of secular, democratic and liberal philosophies, widespread literacy, the rise of the mass media, the widening of the military draft, and the emergence of the public sphere, produce “a new, much more politicised citizenry” (Malešević 2010, 9). Secondly, the dissemination of Enlightenment values makes the use of violence more illegitimate than in any previous era. Finally, with the rise of organised violence to the degree seen in the twentieth century, the distance between our use of violence, and our attitudes to violence, has never been greater. Language has been under ever more pressure to reconcile “this violent reality with the profoundly anti-violence normative universe of the era” (Malešević 2010, 10).

### 1.3 The Problem of Language in Sociology/Critical Theory

It is not surprising that the power of language has attracted attention from scholars in disciplines outside of linguistics. Attention to language appears in the writings of most sociologists at some point, even if “sustained engagement with language is quite rare” (Hasan 2005c, 279). Marx wrote of language as “practical consciousness”, and argued that the “production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men” (Marx and Engels 1998, 49, 41). But in an apparent contradiction of these claims, he also argues that the form of the intercourse between individuals is “determined by production”, and that “neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only *manifestations* of actual life” (Marx and Engels 1998, 37, 473, emphasis in original). Weber has little to say directly about language, but is everywhere concerned with meaning, even according it a central place in his definition of the term “action”, as that to which “the acting individual attaches a meaning” (Weber 1978). Habermas argues that, by not linking meaning to the linguistic medium, Weber “parts company with a theory of communicative action” (Habermas 1985, 279), which Habermas develops drawing principally on speech act theory in dialogue with Weber. After a brief account of the typologies of Austin and Searle, Habermas acknowledges the problems entailed in recruiting a “formal-pragmatic approach”, which dwells on “the rational reconstruction of isolated, highly idealized speech acts” (Habermas 1985, 328). Habermas offers some suggestions for how to bring “pure types of linguistically mediated interaction” to “the complexity of natural situations” (Habermas 1985, 328–30). But to try to add in the complexity of natural contexts to abstract and decontextualised speech acts is “somewhat like idealizing the nourishment out of loaf of bread and then adding vitamins in order to enrich it” (Halliday 2003h, 80).

For Derrida, “the problem of language”, however conceptualised, is not simply one among many. Writing in the late 1960s, he argued that the attention to language was gathering new steam: “never as much as at present has it invaded ... the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogenous discourse” (Derrida 1976, 6). Although preoccupied with language, linguistics appears in Derrida’s work largely as a haunting spectre, bequeathing the “transcendental signified” and the metaphysics of “presence” to Western philosophy. The idea that linguistics has only obscured whatever aspect of discourse was in focus (“writing”, “symbolic power”, “social agency”) is a recurrent theme from many scholars outside of linguistics. Bourdieu, for instance, ascribes unlimited power to language, describing it as “the exemplary formal mechanism whose generative capacities are without limit”, and as “the principal support of the dream of absolute power” (Bourdieu 1991b, 41, 42). Yet “linguists” fail to understand this power because they “merely incorporate into their theory a pre-constructed object, ignoring its social laws of construction and masking its social genesis” (Bourdieu 1991c, 44).

For Bourdieu, the problem comes from Saussure’s “inaugural act”, that of separating the “external” elements of linguistics from the “internal” elements. This act, “by

reserving the title of linguistics for the latter, excludes from it all the investigations which establish a relationship between language and anthropology, the political history of those who speak it, or even the geography of the domain where it is spoken” (Bourdieu 1991a, 33). For Giddens, linguistics has nothing to offer in the explanation of two key sociological objects of study, agency and social institutions, because language is “in a basic sense only explicable through an understanding of these” (Giddens 1987b, 200). This failure of linguistics Giddens also ascribes to Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*, which separates “the specific contingent and individual character of *parole*” from “the systematic, non-contingent, social character of *langue*”, making of language an “idealized system” (Giddens 1979, 17). Although Giddens suggests that Chomsky’s “competence/performance” distinction is “in major respects superior to the *langue/parole* differentiation” (Giddens 1987a), he rejects all forms of structuralist linguistics on the basis that all isolate language from its natural social contexts. The linguistic turn, he argues, is “in a sense a turn away from linguistics, conceived as an independently formed discipline, towards examining the mutual coordination of language and praxis” (Giddens 1979, 17).

Yet in turning to language, what have scholars of ideology provided by way of description? Thompson argues that, while sociology has been big on theory, it has rarely given attention to description with “detailed investigations of actual ideologies, that is, to the ways in which ideology is actually manifested in the conceptions and expressions of everyday life” (Thompson 1984, 232). Despite a recognition that ideology must be at work in the very interactions that shape everyday life – in the texts of media companies, in the private and public discourse of politics and business, in every interaction in schools, hospitals and prisons – the scholars who have most clearly elucidated the power of ideology have not provided a description of its mechanics or methods for its actual analysis. The problem of ideology has suffered a “divide between theoretical reflection and practical analysis” (Thompson 1984, 232). It seems it is “much easier ... to observe in a general way that language and social life are inextricably linked than it is to develop this observation in a rigorous and compelling way” (Thompson 1991, 1).

## 1.4 The Problem of Ideology in Linguistics

If scholars on ideology have had little to say on the details of language, what has linguistics been able to illuminate about the nature of ideology? The most visible work on ideology today within the field of linguistics is “Critical Discourse Analysis” (CDA).<sup>2</sup> The focus of CDA, as stated by one of its leading proponents nearly 30 years ago, is on “uncovering injustice, inequality, taking sides with the powerless and suppressed” and making “mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagoguery, and propaganda explicit and transparent” (Wodak 1989a, xiv).

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<sup>2</sup>In recent years the term “Critical Discourse Analysis” is also being referred to as “Critical Discourse Studies” (Wodak and Meyer 2016).