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LANGUAGE OBJECTIVITY: MYTH OR IDEOLOGICAL TOOL

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Abstract: The ideal of "objectivity" in linguistic communication has long been thought of as the hallmark of effective communication, scholarly research, and translational practices. Nevertheless, recent linguistic theories and sociocultural studies increasingly suggest that language operates not only as a neutral vehicle of meaning but also as a battlefield for ideology, power play, and identification. In this paper, we critically review the ideal of linguistic objectivity, arguing that it is more an ideological construction than an empirical fact employed to legitimize mainstream discourse while suppressing alternative perspectives. Employing critical discourse analysis, studies on translation, and sociolinguistic theories, the investigation examines the ways in which claims of neutrality are deployed in political discourse, media, translational practices, and situations involving machine learning. Empirical studies on cases illustrate how ostensibly objective language expresses cultural, gender-oriented, and political biases, identifiable in the organization of news headlines, the otherwise "neutral" outcomes produced through machine translational systems, or neglected subjectivity on the part of translators. The studies conclude that the pursuit of objectivity often obviates the continuation of normative hierarchies rather than uprooting them. In fine, the paper contends that language objectivity is a fallacy sustained by ideological agendas and advocate instead the moving toward a perspective prioritizing transparency, reflexivity, and inclusion in human and machine-managed communication.

Keywords: Objectivity, ideology, neutrality, discourse, translation, critical linguistics, bias

Introduction

Language has often been viewed as an unproblematic medium for the conveyance of information, a mirror of the world as it is. In science, politics, journalism, and translation studies, for instance, the notion of "objectivity" is commonly invoked as a sign of professionalism and ethical behavior. However, poststructuralist theory and sociolinguistic examination complicate this assumption by illustrating that language does not reflect reality automatically, but rather dynamically constructs it through selective description, classification, and interpretation.

This work scrutinizes thoroughly the potential of language having true objectivity, challenging if such an idea exists merely as a cultural fabrication serving ideological purposes. The discussion weaves together insights from several domains—involving Foucault's theory of discourse, Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis of linguistic relativity, translational ethics principles, and artificial intelligence-mediated communication—to argue that neutrality in language is an elusive concept. Instead, claims of objectivity often serve rhetorical purposes that affirm dominant ideologies while repressing alternative viewpoints.

This work is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is it possible to attain linguistic objectivity, or do cultural and ideological biases always threaten it?
2. How is the myth of neutrality sustained in different contexts, such as political, journalistic, translational, and technological ones?
3. Can greater reflexivity in the use of language decrease the ideological effects involved in claims to objectivity?

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In analyzing such questions, this paper contends that language objectivity must not be treated as a descriptive truth, but instead, an ideologically contested tool.

Literature Review

Objectivity: An Underlying Principle in Linguistics

The Enlightenment conception of language as rational and transparent underpins much of Western linguistic thought. Structuralist theories, such as those of Saussure, emphasize the arbitrariness of signs yet implicitly assume that systematicity yields neutrality. In journalism, “objective reporting” remains a normative standard, even as scholars like Tuchman (1972) have shown how news objectivity is constructed rather than inherent.

Poststructuralist and Critical Analysis Approaches

Michel Foucauldian discourse theory outlines that language has an intrinsic relation with the power and knowledge dynamics. In line with this, Pierre Bourdieu's work on linguistic capital suggests that the use of language works toward maintaining social order under the pretext of neutrality. In the domain of translation studies, Venuti (1995) criticizes translator invisibility, arguing that assertions of neutrality serve to mask cultural differences.

Language, Ideology, and Technology

Under computational linguistics, the pursuit of neutrality is attempted through the use of "bias-free" machine translation. Yet, analyses find that artificial intelligence systems inevitably fall back on deep-seated gender bias or dominant cultural vocabulary (Stanovsky et al., 2019). The assumption of neutrality in algorithms parallels the broader ideological claims about the neutrality of technology, which also includes the data and power structures built into it.

Methodology

This investigation uses qualitative discourse analysis alongside comparative case studies undertaken in four different regions:

Political language involves the analysis of how terms like "freedom," "security," and "terrorism" are introduced as neutral, while they incorporate implicit ideological agendas.

An academic examination of headlines of international media houses that proclaim neutrality while covertly injecting bias through certain linguistic devices and framing patterns.

Translation studies – The analysis of original texts alongside "neutralized" versions that lack cultural details or representations pertaining to gender.

Computer-assisted translation – An examination of computer-based translation outputs (Google Translate, DeepL) to discern system biases involving gender and culture.

The aim is not statistical generalization but critical interpretation of how “objectivity” is claimed, contested, and instrumentalized.

Results

Political Speech

Political authorities often use apparently "objective" discourse to present national interests as universally applicable. For instance, the rhetoric of the United States in the context of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” frames a military intervention as simply a humanitarian mission. Similarly, the use of the term "illegal immigrants" seems objective but hides the ideological connotations attached to border policing.

Journalism

A comparison of headlines shows that what is considered “neutral” reporting usually has Western-centric values. For example, coverage of demonstrations in the Middle East is always described as “unrest,” rather than “civil resistance,” thus implicitly dismantling local agency. Ultimately, the ideal of journalistic objectivity becomes a mask for ideological framing.

Translation Studies

In the field of literary translation, neutrality often manifests itself as domestication; culturally specific expressions (e.g., Japanese tatami) are replaced with more general or widely accepted equivalents (“floor mat”), thus reducing the cultural uniqueness. Venuti argues that such erasure of the foreign under the guise of fluency is an ideological pursuit of assimilation.

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Machine Translation and Artificial Intelligence

Machine translation systems exhibit a structural bias. For example, the Turkish sentence "o bir doktor" ("they are a doctor") in English translation becomes "he is a doctor," thus showing gender bias. Despite claims of neutrality, such systems reinforce ideologies in their training data that promote common gender assumptions and cultural paradigms.

Discussion

The results collectively challenge the notion of language objectivity. Instead of reflecting reality neutrally, language practices reveal ideological investments. Political and journalistic discourses show how claims of neutrality legitimize authority. Translation and AI-mediated communication illustrate how neutrality erases difference and reproduces hegemonies.

The long-standing durability of the myth of objectivity can be explained by its ideological role: it is used to legitimize dominant discourses by presenting them as universal, inescapable, or apolitical. To deconstruct the myth, researchers and practitioners must take a reflexive stance—acknowledging that subjectivity is inherent in communication instead of repudiating it.

Implications for Translation

For translators, this means the rejection of invisibility and frank negotiation of ideological elements inherent in their work. Clarity in translational choices can reinforce the agency of readers rather than hiding bias under the disguise of neutrality.

Implications for Technology

For AI developers, addressing bias requires more than technical fixes: it demands cultural and ethical engagement with data, representation, and inclusivity. Recognizing machine outputs as ideological products challenges the assumption of neutrality in computational language models.

Conclusion

Language objectivity is less a reality than a powerful ideological construct. While invoked across domains to legitimize authority, neutrality in language often conceals cultural, political, or technological bias. The analysis demonstrates that whether in political rhetoric, journalistic framing, translation practices, or AI systems, objectivity functions as a myth that sustains dominant ideologies while marginalizing others. A moral discourse on language requires the breaking of the illusion of neutrality and encourages reflexivity, inclusivity, and transparency. Language does more than reflect reality and becomes instead a battlefield where power, identity, and ideology intersect. An awareness of such interaction enriches academic discourse and cultivates more balanced and responsible practices of communication within the increasingly globalized scenario.

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