Towards an Integrated Approach to Language Policy and Ideology in Critical Discourse Studies

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This critical language policy (Tollefson 1991; 2006) study integrates multiple methods to analyze the discursive construction of language ideology within the context of the English Only movement in the United States. Proponents of English Only, a political movement, contend that English is threatened and needs official protection. May (2001) problematizes the English Only movement because its arguments assume that English is a unifying force while multilingualism is destructive of national unity. The reproduction of language ideology, which is essential to an analysis of such arguments, leads to the valuation of some languages and speakers over others, thereby contributing to inclusion and exclusion within U.S. society as certain speakers experience both material and symbolic social effects. This paper draws on the Discourse Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak 2009) to develop an eclectic, multi-methodological framework for the discursive analysis of language policy and language ideology, with a specific focus on the construction of English in relation to other languages in U.S. public life. In doing so, it adopts Wodak’s (2006) methodology for the analysis of language policies, emphasizing both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches to examine how languages are supported in their public validity, their functionality and their dissemination. Through a close socio-historical and textual analysis of ‘formal’ public texts produced by English Only proponents and ‘informal’ texts produced by respondents to a language attitudes questionnaire, this study combines data sets and methods to examine whether the language ideologies revealed in English Only discourse are reproduced in the attitudes of ordinary people. Thus, the focus of this paper is methodological, and its primary aim is to consider both the strengths and challenges of a multi-methodological, integrated approach that views language policy as social and discursive action and situates it within critical discourse studies.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Studies, Critical Language Policy, Language Ideology.