



**Text 2**

One dimension of 'common sense' is the meaning of words. Most of the time, we treat the meaning of a word (and other linguistic expressions) as a simple matter of fact, and if there is any question about 'the facts' we see the dictionary as the place where we can check up on them. For words we are all perfectly familiar with, it's a matter of mere common sense that they mean what they mean! I shall suggest below that common sense is as suspect here as elsewhere. But a brief discussion of two aspects of meaning in language will be helpful in the critique of commonsensical meaning: firstly, the variability of meaning, and secondly, the nature of meaning systems.

Because of the considerable status accorded by common sense to 'the dictionary', there is a tendency to generally underestimate the extent of variation in meaning systems within a society. For, although some modern dictionaries do attempt to represent variation, 'the dictionary' as the authority on word meaning is very much a product of the process of codification of standard languages and thus closely tied to the notion that words have fixed meanings. (Recall the discussion of standardization in Ch. 3.). It is easy enough to demonstrate that meanings vary between social dialects (discussed in Ch. 2), but they also vary ideologically: one respect in which discourse types differ is in their meaning systems. Let us take as an example a word which figures prominently in this book; the word ideology itself.

Ideology certainly does not give the impression of having a single fixed meaning - far from it! Indeed, it is not unusual to find words like ideology described as 'meaningless' because they have so many meanings. But the situation is not quite that desperate: ideology does have a number of meanings, but it is not endlessly variable in meaning, and the meanings it has tend to cluster together into a small number of main 'families'.

**Text 3**

A major work of discourse analysis which bears directly on the function and power of writing in the colonial situation is *The Conquest of America* by Tzvetan Todorov (Todorov 1974). The revolutionary insight of this book is its location of the key feature of colonial oppression in the control over the means of communication rather than the control over life and property or even language itself.

Cortez's successful campaign against the Aztecs of Central America is explained by the Spaniard's seizure and domination from the beginning of the means of communication. The problem for Aztec oral culture, based as it was on a ritual and cyclic interpretation of reality, was that there was simply no place in its scheme of things for the unpredicted arrival of Cortez. Todorov's contention is that, as a result, when Aztec and Spanish culture met they constituted nothing less than two entirely incommensurable forms of communication. Aztec communication is between man and the world, because knowledge always proceeds from a reality which is already fixed, ordered, and given. On the other hand European communication (although this is not automatic and inevitable, as we see from Columbus's lack of rapport with the Indians) is between man and man. The principle which Todorov sees as central, the control of the means of communication, is the empowering factor in any colonial enterprise. The intrusion of the colonizer is not always attended by the confusion which gripped the Aztecs, but control is always manifested by the imposed authority of a system of writing, whether writing already exists in the colonized culture or not.

Montezuma's problem was that no basis existed for an adequate understanding of the information he received about the conquistadores because no place existed for them in Aztec reality - the Other was always that which could be foreseen. The only explanation was that they were gods, in which case opposition would be futile. This reaction to the radical incursion of the Other is paradigmatic for the incursion of the written word into the oral world. When he receives information from spies about Cortez, 'Montezuma lowered his head, and without answering a word, placed his hand upon his mouth'. Faced with the inexplicable, the only recourse of the oral system is silence. But silence envelops the written word which proceeds 'from silence to possibility...What Cortez wants from the first is not to capture but to comprehend; it is signs which chiefly interest him, not their referents.' To this end his first and most significant action is to find an interpreter.

Demikianlah akhir dari kuisisioner ini. Sekali lagi kami mengucapkan terimakasih atas partisipasi Anda.  
[This marks the end of the questionnaire. Once again, we sincerely thank you for your participation.]

Hormat kami, 23 Agustus 2021  
[Sincerely, August 23, 2021]

Tim Peneliti  
[The Research Team]