Zooming-In, Zooming-Out:
Addressing ideology in a South African university classroom

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Abstract

Ideologically constructed notions of the 'other' serve to entrench divisions and effectively keep those perceived as 'different' at arm's length. In South Africa, the practice of defining oneself and others according to racial and ethnic categories continues to dictate perceptions of identity. Because of the nature of ideology, such perceptions prove elusive and difficult to address, particularly so for those most influenced by such beliefs. This paper suggests that a curriculum which aims to disrupt such common-sense notions could be well-served by the inclusion of sound theoretical content on ideology, linked to simple and transferable strategies which could be used to address ideological notions. The strategies of 'zooming-in' and 'zooming-out' were developed within the context of a first year university course on 'language and ideology' and have proven to be effective in enabling students to engage with ideological assumptions, including those relating to the identity of the 'other'.

Keywords: assumptions, identity, ideology, 'other', race

Introduction

'Please ask them to keep quiet and stop distracting me'.

The request was directed at me, the lecturer, but the reaction of the two students being referenced immediately conveyed an offense beyond that of the surface meaning of the words. In consultation with the students afterwards, Mark denied any implication of racial slant and his two classmates, Simphiwe and Luyanda[1], struggled to clarify why they assumed he was guilty. Situations

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[1] The names of the students have been changed but Mark was a white English student and Simphiwe and Luyanda were isiXhosa home language speakers.

like this exemplify the complexities of relationships in our South African context and the difficult task involved in addressing the ideological assumptions which dictate both the prediction, perception, and potential of inter-personal interactions in our diverse setting.

Insight into why we think and behave the way we do can be key in changing our own perceptions, as well as in our ability to influence others to do the same. My own experience of learning about ideology and how it functions has enabled me, as a white woman in South Africa, to identify and interrogate my own patterns of thought. In addition, it has helped me to identify ideological patterns of thought in the world around me and given me insight into how to address these. As an educator, I have been convicted of the potential transformation this type of knowledge can initiate – both on an individual and societal scale.

Much has been written on addressing social injustice, prejudice, and social division, as well as on interventions and encounters engaging with these issues. There are a number of inspiring accounts of educators who have used their classrooms to conscientise students and contribute to reconciliation and transformation of society (Berlak, 2004; Quinn and Vorster, 2016; Zembylas, 2006). What has perhaps not been as prevalent, is a focus on transferable theoretical insight on the nature and operation of ideology which, in whichever form, has created the systems and contexts in which those injustices and biases thrive.

This paper argues that teaching students strategies to address ideology, informed by sound theoretical input on the nature and operation of ideology, equips them to engage with problematic assumptions and habits of thought in both the world around them, as well as within their own thinking. It will provide a description of a first year university course designed with these goals in mind, along with student feedback on this course. Although students were required to apply the content and strategies taught to interrogate assumptions made regarding different language groups in our South African society, the curriculum would also be applicable to alternate contexts and issues. The strategies of 'zooming-in ' and 'zooming-out', based upon a theoretical understanding of ideology, were developed as part of the curriculum in order to provide students with uncomplicated but conceptually strong strategies to use in addressing ideological issues.

After a brief discussion of context, this paper will give an overview of the theories which underpin the course – much of which forms part of the lecture content in a simplified form. Thereafter, I will share some of the student feedback on the course to illustrate how the background knowledge regarding ideology, as well as the strategies of zooming-in and zooming-out, proved useful in addressing ideological assumptions about the 'other', and consequently in promoting a new understanding among students of different backgrounds.

Background

The classroom provides an opportunity to introduce students to the concept of ideology and, in application, to expose and examine ideological notions which otherwise operate imperceptibly. In

South Africa, ideological notions of the 'other' continue to cause division and conflict in our society. Soudien (2012) explains that, during apartheid times, the practice of defining ourselves, as well as others, according to race was normalised. The ideological nature inherent within this system became largely invisible and it came to be seen simply as 'reality' or 'truth'. Despite more than two decades of democracy, the way we see one another is still largely determined by ideological constructions of identity as determined by the apartheid era (Alexander, 2002). Consequently, it is the particular group to which we belong which will determine, to a large extent, how we view those from other groupings in our South African context (Praeg, 2014). Nevertheless, most of us are impervious to this skewed perception of those around us because, as Soudien (2012: 22) explains, 'the ideological disguise which gives race discourse its character is that it pretends not to be there, feigns ignorance, eludes identification and seeks alibis when it is in fact and pervasively present and active'.

Pedagogical spaces provide a rare opportunity to expose the ideological nature of perceptions and beliefs which otherwise function as neutral 'truth'. Keet, et al. (2009) suggest that spaces of teaching and learning could be used to prompt students to interrogate assumptions of difference which cause division. These spaces should allow for 'critical self-reflection' by enabling the individual to 'disconnect' from the particular ideological lens through which they understand the world (their 'meaning-making frames') and, in this way, better comprehend the issues which continue to beget conflict and disunity in our society (Keet, et al., 2009: 112).

The ability to identify ideology at work requires an understanding of what it is and how it functions. One could compare this to learning the grammar of one's mother tongue. When given an explanation of the rules that underlie the use of language, a child becomes aware of patterns and rules that, although unconscious, have determined his/her everyday speech. Once the child has explicit knowledge of that which was previously present but implicit, he/she is able to confirm the validity of this new knowledge by applying it to his/her own experience of language and by listening afresh to the way other people use language. In a similar fashion, the explanation and exposure of the patterns underlying ideology should be geared towards enabling students to note and understand that which has always been present but never explicit. This would make it possible for them to identify ideological influences in their own lives, as well as in the world around them.

This process will not necessarily be a comfortable one and may challenge, in this sense, the notion of the classroom as a 'safe space'; however, the definition of the term 'safe space' deserves clarification. Firstly, pre-existing inequalities among students (for example in terms of economic or historical disadvantages) already render every classroom as safe for some students and not for others (Steyn and Davis, 2012; Jansen, 2009). Secondly, the notion of 'safe' should not be confused with that of 'comfort'. As Steyn and Davis (2012) note, an educator can never guarantee comfort within the classroom as new knowledge always poses a potential challenge to an existing worldview. In fact, many agree that discomfort in the learning process, particularly in terms of adjusting one's worldview, is inevitable and potentially a very effective pedagogical tool (Zembylas, 2015; Berlak

2004; Steyn and Davis, 2012). This is particularly true, claims Zembylas (2017: 8), 'in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices that sustain social inequities' as this process creates 'openings for individual and social transformation'.

A course which intends to prompt students to identify ideological influences in their own patterns of thinking will, if it is successful in its goals, inevitably cause – at least – discomfort. We are generally not open to the interrogation of our own beliefs and ideas (Žižek, 2012; Geertz, 1973) and oblivious to the ideological nature of our thinking (Soudien, 2012). It is not comfortable to come to the realisation that one's beliefs and ideas have – to a large extent – been dictated by an ideological system of thought and are not necessarily the product of one's own reasoning and experience (Rudman, 2018: 118). It is not comfortable to then examine the tenets of those ideologies and find them lacking, nor to reflect on one's own behaviour determined by those ideologies and possibly feel regret, shame, or loss (Rudman, 2018: 121). It is also not comfortable to have others make explicit how their ideological notions have constructed the manner in which they perceive you (even if you suspected it beforehand). A safe space, in pedagogical terms, should therefore not be equated with the idea of student comfort because education, in the real sense of the word, continually prompts growth. and growth could involve discomfort and even distress (Berlak, 2004: 140). It should also be noted that not all students will respond similarly to new knowledge. Educators should not be disconcerted if some students resist the engagement requested of them by a discomforting pedagogical venture (Steyna and Davis, 2012). In fact, Zembylas (2010) notes that some students may 'adopt an anti-oppressive change, others may resist, and still others may experience distress'. However, this should not be taken as an indication that these students were left untouched or untransformed by the process. For some students, changes prompted by new knowledge may take time to germinate and bear fruit (Steyn and Davis, 2012).

Rather than comfort, a safe teaching space should be characterised by 'a way of thinking, feeling, and acting that fosters students' critical rigor' (Zembylas, 2015: 166). The focus on theoretical input in the university course discussed in this paper aims to allow students to develop such 'critical rigour' in both their ability to identify and address ideological influences at work. The following section will outline the theoretical framework on which the course is based and includes content which is shared with students in the course.

Literature review

What is ideology and how does one become an ideological subject?

Ideology could be described as that which determines how one understands the world. An ideological system of thought, explains Masolo (1995: 27), presents a particular perception of the world; it 'tell us how things are or were, and how they come or came to be'. Similarly Althusser (1971) describes it as the way in which an individual represents or interprets reality to themselves but he stresses that it should be understood as imaginary and within the context of a social formation. His

definition of ideology as 'a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' implies that no matter the system of values used to interpret reality, the resultant perspective is never an objective account of reality (Althusser, 1971: 153).

The imaginary aspect is also emphasised in Zizek's (2012: 1) definition of ideology as the 'generative matrix that regulates the relationship between visible and non-visible, between imaginable and non-imaginable'. As such, his view of ideology is as a divided domain - a dialectical relationship between the realm of the symbolic (language as a meaning-making medium) and the 'unthinkable, unrepresentable and unmediatable' realm of the 'Real' which defies explanation (Feldner and Vighi, 2007: 29). The former (the symbolic) is the medium in which we try to understand our reality and explain meaning, and therefore ideology operates in this realm to present itself as an acceptable interpretation of material existence However, despite its attempt to impose order and coherence upon the Real, this is never achieved. Hence, the contradictions within ideology (which go unnoticed because of the manner in which ideology operates).

We become subjects of ideology simply by entering the world. Every individual is born into a particular familial and societal context which determines their initial and foundational understanding of the world. In this sense, the individual is 'always-already' a subject of ideology (Althusser, 1971: 176), but this subjecthood is confirmed through the way in which the individual lives – in other words, through their beliefs, actions and words which comply with the tenets of that particular ideology. The individual's tangible response to the ideology (through their actions), referred to by Althusser as 'interpellation', is the proof or 'recognition that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world' (Althusser, 1971: 178). This generally happens as a natural outflow of living within the precincts of the ideology – for example, when I fill in my university application and then tick the appropriate box under 'race', I am acknowledging my place in a system which categorises people in terms of their race, and along with that, implicitly asserting my allegiance to this race-oriented ideology.

How does ideology work?

Ideology operates largely outside of the explicit, conscious domain, but is rather incorporated into assumptions which an individual, as a member of a society, makes about reality. As part of a society, one is oblivious to the fact that one is 'in ideology' because in that context the relevant tenets and beliefs appear simply as reality, as 'the way things are'. As such, 'our concepts of knowledge and truth will not seem to be constraints; rather, they will seem normal, commonsensical' (Clifford, 1987: 121). Thus, for the subject of an ideology, the 'situation appears to be "ideologically empty" despite its fundamental ideological effect' (Fairclough, 2001: 76). For this reason, it would generally be very difficult to convince someone that their own set of beliefs is ideological, even though they would admit to this being the case for others. As Althusser (1971: 175) explains, it 'is well known [that] the accusation of being in ideology always only applies to others, never to oneself'.

There are different ways to understand the 'blind allegiance' shown to an ideology by its subjects. Althusser suggests that because of the subject's deep personal immersion in a particular system of thought, they are unable to note the ideological nature of their thinking (which, he claims, is only obvious from a position 'outside' of ideology). He explains that although one may understand the general nature of ideology and even be able to recognise specific ideologies in the world around one, it is almost certain that the system of beliefs to which one oneself adheres appears not as an ideology but, in contrast, as truth itself. The subject of an ideology, in this sense, cannot 'see the wood for the trees' - the implication being that there is a need to impose distance between the subject and the ideology in order for them to note the ideological nature of what they believe.

On the other hand, seen from a different perspective, the blind allegiance could be attributed to the fact that the subject of an ideology actually only interacts with the core beliefs of that ideology from a distance. This is the suggestion of Žižek who claims that distance is 'the central formal feature of ideology' (Feldner and Vighi, 2007: 32). He theorises that the subject of an ideology does not place his or her belief in the content of an ideology but rather in the supposition that these ideas are believed by another (the 'big Other' as he suggests) who has, by implication, confirmed the legitimacy of these principles (Žižek, 2014). In this sense, what we need in order to believe is not a belief which operates in the first person but rather, 'we need to believe that there is someone who believes, even if that someone is purely hypothetical' (Žižek, 2014). To illustrate his explanation, Žižek uses the analogy of 'canned laughter'[2] (Feldner and Vighi, 2007: 31) which, in laughing for us, implies that someone else has examined the content of a sitcom and found it to be funny. It then prompts us when to laugh or simply laughs for us. In the same way, the individual subject does not personally engage with the core beliefs of an ideology but, via his/her 'belief through others', is prompted on how to think and act accordingly.

Whether understood as operating at a distance from the subject, or in proximity, the 'invisibility' of ideology is assured by its disguise as 'truth' or the 'obvious'. This invisibility – or the ability to 'pretend to be what it is not' (Fairclough 2001:76) – grants an ideology 'the power to project [its] practices as universal and "common sense"' (Fairclough, 2001: 27). The ideology which, in the end, extends the greatest influence, is the one which is uncritically accepted as truth and no longer thought of as a belief or opinion as it is then rendered 'impervious to any form of critique and deconstruction' (Soudien, 2012:15).

How do ideological systems attain power?

How, then, do systems of thought attain this ideological power? The relationship between ideology and discourse is important to note in this regard. Olivier (2012: 50) explains that beliefs, values and

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[2] Canned laughter refers to the practice of using recorded laughter as a sound effect in television programmes, initiated in the 1950s by Charles R. Douglass (Feldner and Vighi, 2007: 31)

norms pertaining to human behaviour as well as (ethical and political) action are embedded in language; this is the ideological 'cargo' of language, referred to as 'discourse'. A discourse can become so widespread and accepted that the ideology which it embodies in linguistic terms, ceases to be seen as referring to a particular interpretation of reality but is understood, instead, to be a reflection of reality itself – a process referred to by Fairclough (2001: 76) as the 'naturalisation' of a discourse. In such a situation, the ideological beliefs inherent in the dominant discourse become 'all-encompassing and pervade[s] all aspects of life', shaping the society according to the relevant tenets (Zak, 2016). This process reflects Bourdieu's (2003: 168) concept of the 'recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness', referring to the legitimization of ideological claims as truth by misrecognising them as such. Through this process the beliefs and practices embedded in such a (largely hidden) system of thought become the uncontested explanation of that which is. Of course, as history unfolds and power dynamics change (or don't), the dominant discourses, and thus ideologies, will fluctuate (or not) accordingly.

How can one address ideology?

Addressing ideology is thus no easy task. An ideology which is legitimised in the form of a naturalised discourse will be interwoven through the societal context in which it exists, in this way resassuring the subject at every turn that this is indeed 'truth' and the only manner in which to understand the world. In order to address such an ideology, it would need to be made explicit to the subject in order for him/her to gain perspective on its core beliefs and to note the influence of these in his/her own thoughts and actions. The strategies of zooming-out and zooming-in refer to two methods of doing this.

'Zooming-out' refers to the attempt to assess ideological tenets from a more objective view – to 'disconnect' from one's own 'meaning-making frames' as Keet, et al. (2009: 112) describe it. Seen from the perspective that one's blind allegiance is due to immersion in a particular ideological system, the attempt to distance oneself from the core beliefs could enable one to more clearly note the characteristics of that system of thought as well as its influence on one's own ideas. As such, one could understand Althusser's (1971: 175) suggestion that 'it is necessary to be outside ideology … to be able to say: I am in ideology' to imply that the recognition of notions as ideological is more easily done through stepping back in order to increase objectivity in one's assessment.

Although accessing the 'outside' of ideology may be problematic, one way of gaining some perspective on one's own views, according to Fairclough (2001), is through encounters with those who have a different ideological perception of the world. Such exposure enables us to discern the 'arbitrariness and social relativity' inherent in our own ideological convictions (Fairclough, 2001: 88). In fact, Belsey (2002: 63) suggests that interaction with the 'other' both makes us aware of the ideological nature of our own thinking and also 'demonstrate[s] that there are alternative ways to be, that our own ways are not inevitable and therefore not necessarily "natural"'. Thus, encountering

difference could help one to zoom-out and note that one's perceptions and beliefs are but one way to understand the world, in this way enabling one to more objectively (or at least, given the unattainability of complete 'objectivity', with less subjection to its claims regarding our allegiance) perceive an ideological issue.

On the other hand, those who take the view that distance is not the solution to exposing an ideology but rather the guarantor of non-exposure (Bjerre and Lausten, 2010: 36), would suggest a different strategy . If, as Žižek suggests, we operate at a distance from our ideological allegiances and have never closely examined them, the appropriate strategy would thus entail drawing nearer to those core beliefs rather than moving further away. With reference to the example of canned laughter (the analogy used by Žižek), one would need to 'draw near' and engage personally with the content of a sitcom in order to respond with authentic laughter or not. In the same way, in order to address one's ideological convictions, one would need to deliberately, critically and personally engage with the core ideological principles of the system of thought to which one adheres in one's material existence, and then respond with 'authentic', justifiable belief, or not. According to Parker (2007: 145), Žižek uses the term 'over-identification' in alluding to an approach in which one 'homes in' on an ideology via an exaggerated embracing of its core principles - in a sense, 'pushing the ideology to its logical limits'. This would involve thinking through the implicit beliefs and assumptions which underlie the functioning of this system of thought, hereby foregrounding that which was previously 'hidden', but nevertheless determinant of behaviour and thought. In this way, internal paradoxes and contradictions emerge from within rather than being supposed – and imposed - from the outside. This aligns with Belsey's (1980: 57) suggestion that it is the very nature of ideology itself which makes it susceptible to exposure because, although it 'masquerades' as a coherent explanation of reality, upon closer examination one would be able to note its nature as 'a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades'. In order to expose and make explicit these aspects of an ideology, one would need to (through intense engagement with the core beliefs) closely and critically scrutinize that which was previously taken for granted. In our module, we refer to this strategy as 'zooming-in'.

The strategies of zooming-out and zooming-in are intended for use particularly in the examination of one's own ideological beliefs. However, Žižek warns that an individual or an institution which is 'in ideology' will not take easily to being interrogated because, as a subject, not only has one formed an affinity with those ideas, but they have generally determined the meaning and coherence with which one has attributed one's life (Fiennes, 2012). It is, therefore, predictable that it is those most steeped in ideology who will most forcefully resist the examination of their ideas because 'men do not care to have beliefs to which they attach great moral significance examined dispassionately, no matter for how pure a purpose' (Geertz, 973: 195). An ideology that has attained the status of common sense will aggressively fend off attempts at examination, as

Belsey (1980: 45) states, 'in the interests of the preservation of the existing social formation'. When threatened by exposure or interrogation, an ideology will defend itself in various ways, for example, by dismissing 'as "unnecessary jargon" any discourse which conflicts with its own' (Fairclough, 2001: 82). Another tactic, according to Fairclough (2001: 82), is to simply ridicule any alternative views, for example, through the use of laughter which is an 'established way of handling those who refuse to accept the obvious'. With the above in mind, the attempt to make explicit and address ideological notions in a classroom needs to be approached in a stealthy and strategic manner.

Ideology and the English Language Studies class

The challenge in teaching a course on ideology is therefore not necessarily the explanation of concepts or the transference of content but convincing students that these principles have influenced their own perceptions of the world. The first step thus appears to be the presentation of the concept of ideology in a manner which students are able to recognise and confirm in the world around them and, leading on from this, in their own thought processes. A sound theoretical introduction to the concept of ideology, along with step-by-step application tasks characterises the curriculum for the 'language and ideology' section of the English Language studies module.

The module is a first semester course at Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and is currently taken by between 500 and 600 students. The student group reflects a diverse mix of ethnicities and cultures and includes mother tongue speakers of isiXhosa, Afrikaans, English, Zulu, and other languages (mainly) indigenous to South Africa. The lectures are taught by a colleague and myself and tutorials are led by a team of post-graduate students. The 'Language and Ideology' section of the module introduces students to the concepts of ideology, setting a foundation for the ensuing section on discourse analysis. Language itself is unavoidably tainted by ideology – a fact often overlooked because 'the meanings one assigns to the world are reflections of those ideas inherent within the "symbolising systems" into which one is born, language being the primary example' (Belsey, 2002:7). It is through language that common sense assumptions, always ideological in nature, are constructed and through the use of such that they are perpetuated and maintained (Belsey, 1980:45). The emphasis which is placed upon language as a repository for ideology in the section of the course described in this paper, is further explored and developed in the subsequent section of the module on discourse analysis.

Students are encouraged, through class tasks, tutorials, and assignments, to recognise ideological patterns in given scenarios and to use the strategies of zooming-in and zooming-out in order to engage with the relevant notions. During the course, ideological assumptions made about identity are foregrounded in examples and tasks. Towards the end of the section, students are asked to consider the assumptions made, in general, about the various language groups (in terms of identity) in the South African context – thus enabling a general recognition of such discursive-ideological patterns without necessarily laying personal claim to them, We then move

the focus from the general to the specific by asking them to write individual reflections on the validity of such assumptions, thus claiming those with which they themselves identify.

After the initial individual reflections, students complete a task in groups comprising fellow classmates from different language backgrounds. The topics of discussion revolve around the issues of assumptions made about one another in terms of language identity and the ideological constructs which underlie these. Some may argue that most of the pertinent issues relating to identity assumptions in South Africa relate to race (in particular, such categorisations as set up by our apartheid past) and that using the markers of 'language' rather than 'race' evades a central issue. These concerns were taken into account but our decision to approach the issue in this way was guided by two aspects. Firstly, we anticipated that the aforementioned disinclination to confront or interrogate one's personal ideologies would be magnified by the contextual inflammatory discourse on race in our country, a context described by Khumalo (2018: 5) as characterised by 'racial hatred and animosity' . Although our intention was not to avoid discomfort, we wanted to ensure maximum student participation in the tasks. South Africa's apartheid past has rendered an already sensitive subject even more painful – thus making it unlikely that students would allow the interrogation of their own ideological assumptions on this topic. Secondly, as Jansen (2013: 225) points out – and as supported in the data – language groups and race are conflated in South Africa and examining one very often implies examining the other. Thus it appeared more strategic to access ideological assumptions on identity via a less defensive and thus more accessible route.

After the group discussion, students are required to do a final individual reflective task in which they consider the following questions:

• Over the period of this module and your group discussions, have you encountered anything that challenged or changed how you thought of the identities of

- your own language group/s?
- other language groups?

• Has any of the content or your reflections influenced the way you think about language and the way it is used to speak about the identities of others?

It is emphasised, when this task is given, that no particular opinion or response is required of students and that marks will be allocated only for handing in and for answering the questions in a relevant manner (in other words, that the answers relate to the questions).

Due to the qualitative nature of the research focus in this paper, the study was restricted to considering only approximately 60 of the student tasks but the themes which emerged from these were reflective of those noted in the feedback of the larger group as well. The findings indicate some of the prominent themes noted when reading the student narratives. For the purposes of this study,

the student excerpts which have been included reflect comments related to the strategies of zooming-out and zooming-in as well as the process of becoming aware of ideology.

Ethical considerations

Students were asked to consent (in writing) to allow excerpts of their narratives to be included in this research. The topic of research was explained to them and they were assured of anonymity if they were to consent. Informed consent documents were handed out in class, offering students the opportunity to agree or disagree to this. It was emphasised that the participation or non-participation in this study would *have no impact on their assessment*. Only the written reflections of consenting students were used in this study

Findings

Forbidden conversations

As explained earlier, ideology works largely in an implicit manner and resists attempts to be exposed. The group discussion topics required students to verbalise and discuss ideological biases which many of them had probably never admitted to explicitly, particularly not to those about whom the assumptions are made. Not only do such assumptions usually remain implicit and, thus, uninterrogated, but they monitor the interactions that students think are possible and those they assume are impossible. Numerous students commented on this aspect, including Students A and B below (both Afrikaans female students):

> Student A: This module did open a conversation that no one really talks about, because you are too scared that you will say something that's offensive to a certain group and doesn't take it up well.

> Student B: At first, I only saw other language groups as way different from mine. I never used to associate myself with other language groups because to me it felt as if we were too different to be in a conversation actually.

These students bring to the fore the way in which perceptions of difference 'forbid' certain 'conversations' within our society. We not only anticipate incompatibility with those perceived as different to us but also sense the requirement to carefully restrict what we say in such interactions. The group discussions created a space for these 'forbidden conversations' and, in making ideological assumptions explicit, many students were able to identify related notions in their own patterns of thinking, as Student C (Afrikaans-English male) and Student D (isiXhosa male) both attest to:

Student C: It opened my eyes in the sense that it revealed assumptions I have of other language groups that I was not aware of.

Student D: I knew that my own set of opinions determined how I saw life but I never got to think about it because what I do every day is natural to me but when we covered the topic I got new insight, it gave me a chance to actually think about the way I saw life.

Student C speaks of coming to the realisation that ideological assumptions dictated his perception of those from other language groups, and Student D similarly speaks of gaining new insight regarding notions which he had previously taken for granted.

Zooming out

Fairclough (2001) and Belsey (2002) predict that encounters with those different to us not only expose our ideological bias but also bring the awareness of alternate interpretations of the world and this is reflected in a number of the student narratives. The interactions with group members prompted a realisation of the subjectivity of their own understanding of the world and, for many, the resolution to take up a more objective position; in other words, to zoom out, as Student E (isiXhosa male) and Student F (isiXhosa female) mention:

Student E: I zoomed out and tried to see this from an objective manner and allowed others to express their views.

Student F: By zooming out, I'm being objective, standing back and distancing myself from the way I see the world and surely, I will notice that that there are alternative interpretations of meaning.

Both students display an understanding of the need to put some distance between themselves and their own subjective viewpoints and to learn of alternative perceptions from others. Students G (isiXhosa female) and Student H (English female) below mention that their decision to zoom-out was encouraged by their encounter with those considered 'different':

Student G: I was forced to challenge my common-sense assumptions about that language group and actually get insight from a person from that language group to educate me about it, allowing for a broader mind-set about other people.

Student H: Before this module I was constantly in thought about my superiority when compared to other language groups and ethnicities and how I found myself constantly

looking down on others ... I was faced with the error of my ways and was forced to rearrange my thinking.

These students imply that, before the module and the group discussions, their beliefs (regarding those from other language groups) remained largely uncontested. For Student G, interactions with her group-mates revealed the subjective and unvalidated nature of her assumptions and she now resolves that in future she will seek accurate information from those concerned, thus taking up a more objective position. Student H speaks of adjusting her way of thinking after the rude realisation that her sense of superiority was invalid. The revelation of her extreme subjectivity leads to the sobering realisation that she needs to 'rearrange' her thinking.

Zooming-in

Once students realise the ideological nature of their own thinking, they are able to zoom-in and examine the core concepts for themselves. This interrogation of ideological assumptions exposes underlying patterns of thought, allowing for conscious consideration of their legitimacy, as is reflected in the words of Student I (Pedi female) and Student J (Afrikaans female):

Student I: I have learned also that through all the ideologies and common-sense assumptions I have and heard about certain groups, I can create a specific identity for them, which may be what they also do with me. Group tasks have also helped me figure out the validity of common-sense assumptions and identities around the world. Some people are not necessarily, how we think they are.

Student J: If I have to be completely honest, I have to admit that I have always been the type of person that has imposed identities onto other people. I have placed people into different boxes my whole life and I didn't just do it with my own racial and language group, but also with other racial and language groups.

Student I realises that she has constructed identities for others using ideological assumptions rather than actual experience. In coming to the unpleasant conclusion that others could have similarly created an identity for her, she resolves that this is not a reliable gauge. Similarly, Student J realises that her interactions with others have been determined by her own biased perceptions of their identity as determined by race and language group. Later in her narrative, she mentions that assumptions she made about isiXhosa people were *changed and challenged* through the interactions in the group task, and concludes with the insight that essentialised notions regarding identity (for example the language group one belongs to) are problematic and should not be taken

at face value. In examining the patterns of thought which determined her previous assumptions regarding such identity, she concludes that these were invalid and need to be discarded.

Other students also speak of applying the strategy of 'zooming-in' to their own thought patterns. Student K (isiXhosa female) writes:

> Student K: These lectures have introduced me to totally new concepts and gave us opportunity to interrogate and zoom in my own belief systems and what truly influence my thoughts and what shaped my ideology ⋯ this has sensitised me and helped me to attend to others [in a] more cautioned [manner] whilst dealing with my own prejudices.

Student K refers explicitly to 'zooming in', applying it in a self-reflective manner to determine that which forms the base of her own 'belief systems'. She then goes on to speak of some of the consequences of doing this and mentions how it has moderated both her treatment of others as well as her response to her own habitual patterns of thought. Student L (English female) below also speaks of zooming in and her intention to use this approach when next she finds herself jumping to a conclusion about someone:

> Student L: If I jump to a conclusion of that person I will have to use the 'zoom in' technique to evaluate myself (as well as my ideologies) and see where those common assumptions are coming from and whether they are valid or invalid.

As is implied in the feedback of these students, the realisation that one's actions and thoughts are often determined by unconsidered / unconscious belief systems is a sobering one. Once one realises that this may be the case, it breeds a healthy skepticism about unexamined opinions and assumptions, as seen in the excerpt from Student L who expresses her intent to monitor her own thinking in terms of ideological influences in the future.

Tools to take forward

Acknowledging the potential impact of one's 'perspectival' subjectivity reveals possible ideological influences in one's own views and sets a foundation, not only for self-reflection, but also for tolerance of and negotiation with alternate views. An increased ability to recognise ideology at work as well as the practical strategies of zooming-in and zooming-out equip students to carry the content of this module beyond the classroom and into the world around them. Student M (Afrikaans female) speaks of having gained an awareness of her own ideological allegiances and an understanding of how to deal with these going forward:

Student M: I would like to be more open-minded and not just accept everything I hear as the truth. It was nice to have a chance to negotiate our Afrikaans viewpoint and to then hear the viewpoint of others. I'm aware of my underlying ideology and I am not going to let it influence me anymore. I will closely examine the core and decide if it is valid or I will stand back and try to be objective.

She mentions both the ideas of zooming-in ('I will closely examine the core') and of zooming-out ('I will stand back and try to be objective') and her intention to use these in addressing her own ideologies in future. Student N (Afrikaans female) and Student O (isiXhosa female) similarly express an awareness of their ideological orientation and their own agency in this regard:

Student N: There are things we say and do subconsciously not knowing that it is linked to the assumptions we hold dear when we make decisions based on it. You don't always have to agree with others, you can make up your own mind about things by not just accepting the 'single story' is true but looking at it from another point of view or finding alternatives.

Student O: I noticed that this belief I held stemmed from the books I have read, movies I have watched and the general points of view in my community which all are based on the historical system of racial and cultural segregation known as Apartheid. I noticed that these socially built barriers could be overcome by actually interacting with members of other language groups.

An understanding of the workings of ideology in society and the opportunity to apply these principles in tasks prompt students to recognise traces of these belief systems within themselves. Student N implies that she has gained insight into both the manner in which ideology influences her own thoughts and actions, as well as on her own potential agency in relation to ideological notions. She references the strategy of zooming-out in her suggestion that one try to look at something from an alternate point of view. Similarly, Student O displays an awareness of her own ideologically influenced ideas and she infers that she has zoomed-in to more closely examine them and their source. This is also implied in her suggestion that one researches the validity of ideological suggestions – in this particular context, through interactional encounters with those about whom the assumptions are made.

Having come to very similar conclusions as the students quoted above, Student P (Afrikaans male), an education student, states his intention to pass on that which he has taken from the course to his future students:

Student P: This course will leave its mark on me and hopefully it will aid me in my classroom to help my students as well to be more accepting of others that are different to them.

Student P, as a future teacher, is convicted of the opportunity he will have to facilitate similar learning in his own classroom one day. The simplicity of the zooming-out and zooming-in strategies ensure that they are transferable and that, if he chooses, this student would be able to pass them on and equip a new generation of learners to critically engage with problematic ideological tenets in their own thinking, as well as in the society around them.

Conclusion

The feedback on the language and ideology course indicates that it was successful in prompting students to make explicit and examine ideological assumptions about the identity of the speakers of different languages in the South African context. A theoretical understanding provided by the content of the course enabled them to identify ideological patterns of thought at work in the class tasks, their own society, and, finally, within themselves. The scaffolding of these exercises from general to more personal was strategic, as was the theoretical input, in persuading students of the existence of such systems of thought and the influence of these in their own lives. Placing students in groups where they were required to negotiate ideological viewpoints with people they would otherwise not have chosen to converse with and on topics that they would generally avoid was also strategic. This seemed to assist students to zoom-out and note the subjectivity of their prior position. In addition, the discussions in these groups (as well as the given tasks) appear to have prompted students to zoom-in in terms of examining the validity of their own beliefs and ideas. The frequent mention of these strategies (zooming-in and zooming-out) in the student feedback implies that not only had students grasped the logic of these but also that they found them useful in application.

Although the group conversations make for some discomfort, many students attest to not only gaining insight into the ideological and untrustworthy nature of their previous assumptions but also to acquiring a renewed perception of those previously considered 'other'. It appears probable that the theory preceding the group discussions had the effect of reducing the offensive nature of the assumptions (made by others about themselves) by explaining how these come about. The opportunity to engage in this task alongside those from different backgrounds allowed for a sense of shared revelations regarding the 'other' as well as new understanding of what is possible in terms of living alongside one another. Of course, not all students expressed the same openness to the content or the tasks but perhaps seeds sown during this time will germinate later (as suggested by Steyn and Davis, 2012).

Both a theoretical understanding of ideology, as well as knowing how to practically engage with it (in this case, through the strategies of zooming-out and zooming-in), appear to be important in equipping students to recognise ideological patterns of thought at work in the world around them and in convincing them to note the influences of these on themselves. The simplification of the 'zooming' concepts makes for easy reference in addressing ideological issues, highlighting the need

for both increased objectivity as well as critical interrogation of own views. Equipped with a basic understanding of the workings of ideology, the reality of their own ideological vulnerability as well as usable strategies for addressing ideological thought when encountered, it is hoped that students are more likely and more able to initiate changes within themselves as well as within their communities.

Author Biography

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