Re-Nouncing Violence – Differentiating Linguistic Violence

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Why is structural discrimination, which I call violence, so enduring, so restabilizing, so indissoluble, despite countless instances of lip service and political equality programs? Is the idea of speaking and writing without discrimination hopelessly utopian? What role does language play regarding the fundamentality and longevity of violence in society? Or, how are language and violence connected? I will debate different ideas regarding the latter question throughout this chapter.

My epistemological starting point is a constructivist understanding that sees all violence as structural discrimination and all language as speech acts. From this starting point, I argue, that, as speech acts are potentially and complexly violent, language is never a mere representation of violence but inherently conveys it.

Understanding and Differentiating Violence

Contemporary German-speaking societies mostly understand violence an individual act or individual suffering: Individuals perform violent acts, and individuals suffer performed violence. This notion is supported, among other things, by a legal understanding that primarily penalizes individuals who intentionally perpetrate violence. This predominantly legal understanding of violence informs societal concepts of *right* and *wrong*, *guilty* and *innocent* in social discourse and media coverage to the degree that violence is irrevocably associated with the bodily acts or bodily harm inflicted and received by individuals (cf. Herrmann, Kramer & Kuch 2007). Because these societal concepts and implicit definitions of violence are so rooted in the physical, the idea that speech acts can be violent is barely recognized in the public consciousness – except perhaps as intentionally uttered *Hate Speech*. Hate speech is mostly understood as a precursor to 'actual', corporeal violence. Within this concept, linguistic actions can potentially pave the way for, incite, or mobilize violent actions. But the speech act itself is not considered violence. This is also closely connected to the fact that speech is is seen as inherently subordinate to action rather than a central course of action for individuals and groups. The struc-

turalistic understanding of language, prevalent in our society, therefore subtly depoliticizes any general understanding of speaking as acting. Only such an understanding could render language analyzable or socially perceptible as violent and thus allow for critical, anti-discriminatory courses of action that could eventually condition a different legal understanding of speach, language, and speech acts.[1]

Structural Violence

Understanding violence as structure in a social context, usually a society, makes it unavoidable for individuals. When this violence is realized through language, through speech acts which include silence, ignoring, and omission, I call it *linguistic violence*. Individuals, as part of a society, are exposed to constitutions of structural violence in multiple ways. From references and appellations, to National or gender categories, to language-based ratings and gradings, to formal addresses or lack thereof, to allocations and attributions, and different modes of conversation. Language conventions in society have to be understood as fundamental and reiterative to the normalization of structural violence. It is telling that the idea of structural violence that manifests in conventions and simulations of language and linguistic systematics has gone widely unrecognized in German and other languages' philologies, whereas it has been widely received and understood as highly relevant in sociological research (cf. Neckel & Sutterluty 2005).[2]

When discriminated individuals point out the directional violence of specific speech acts, the public often defames and dismisses such complaints as censorship, limitation of free speech, or an intervention by the *language police* (exemplary for a reflection of these systematics are Sow 2018; Hornscheidt & Agwu 2010; Kennedy 2002). How these speech acts are handled in the public, as well as some of the linguistic discourse, is based on and reiterates the understanding of language as merely mirroring reality and subordinate to the 'real' actions of people. All of these things combined have a massive stabilizing impact on public and individual views on the connection between language and violence. Under this chapter's lens, constructivist and discrimination-critical, structural linguistic violence is therefore unaddressable and socially un-recognizable. By recognizing violence as structural, this chapter offers a different perspective on power and predominant understandings of language. I will further differentiate specific dimensions of structural vio-

1 The idea that language, not only paves the way for bodily violence but is violence itself, has been brought forth and empirically and theoretically grounded in constructivist and anti-discriminatory linguistic (cf. Frank 1990; Hornscheidt 2014; Hornscheidt & Landqvist 2014), philosophical cf. Herrmann & Kuch 2007; Kramer 2007; Liebsch 2006), and rhetorical (cf. Butler 1997) academic positions.

2 This could lead to a longer debate on the disciplinary normalization of topics and their depoliticization through academic disciplination.

lence that will be relevant for a more foundational and constructivist take on spoken realizations of violence: symbolic, subtle, and epistemic violence.

Symbolic Violence

Maybe the most famous concept of language as violence was introduced by Bourdieu and culminates under the label of 'symbolic violence'. Here, symbolic power is the power to assign meaning. It is about establishing a specific concept of the social world (Bourdieu 1989). The influence of the individual stems from their symbolic capital, which is "a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition." (Ibid.: 23) "In the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for the monopoly over legitimate naming, agents put into action the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles which maybe juridically guaranteed." (Ibid.: 21) With the concept of symbolic power it becomes clear how general ideas of meaning are naturalized and conventionalized through discursive processes. Furthermore, the concept opens up the option to investigate which groups of people within a group of speakers have the prerogative of connotation and can normalize and naturalize meaning (cf. Raijlc 2018). Conventionalized language norms are hence a form of symbolic violence. At the same time, this subtle exertion of violence and power remains unrecognizable because it seems so natural and normal.

Subtle Violence

Burkhard Liebsch uses the term of subtle violence and approaches linguistic violence as a base of human existence with it. Liebsch understands the self as radically experiencing itself dependent on the perception of language, and therefore focuses on violence *in* language rather than *with* language. Aspects like speechlessness or silence as violent speech acts are at the core of his philosophical elaborations. Liebsch writes about the ineluctability of experiencing a life shaped by inherently violent language:

> "Don't we constantly move along the border of a double strangeness, inherent to our own language? On the one hand its original foreignness remains attached to it, on the other hand we subsequently become an estranged from ourselves as pre-symbolic beings. We cannot go back, behind language. Even approaching this border can only ever happen linguistically. Yet, this does not mean that language is a closed cage." (Cf. Liebsch 2007: 17, translation A. G.)

What I want to focus on, is the fundamentality of violence within this concept of language and speech acts, and that Karsta Frank called "Sprachgewalt" ('linguistic violence') in the early 1990s.

> "This archive [of conventionalized linguistic norms] provides new generations with knowledge, in a twofold way: Firstly, the individual accesses objectifications saved in the archive (vocabulary) whenever they talk, whenever they objectivize their experiences, emotions, thoughts, or perception and thus realize them for themselves and others. Language provides those who speak it with prefabrications while simultaneously forcing them into its pre-molded patterns." (Frank 1992: 116, translation A.G.)

At the same time these categorizations and conceptualizations that Frank calls 'prefabrications' are perceived as reality, making them hard to become aware of. In a feminist interpretation of Berger and Luckmann's "Social Construction of Reality" (1966) the matter of how specific groups in society use designations and normative language to make their view of reality a binding norm for all, is of special interest. In this context, the double meaning of the term "Re-Nouncing Violence" becomes evident: conventionally it would mean to forgo the use of violence – but also the metaphorical reference to nouns and annunciations ties it back to language and speaking as more than a mirroring of corporeal violence. At the same time, it also underlines, that the majority of societal violence is not announced, not named, and therefore, in constructivist terms, powerfully perpetuated. This connects concomitantly to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and the idea of epistemic violence.

Epistemic Violence

Under this term I want to gather facets of violence and power that are realized through the production, distribution, and reception of knowledge. What is socially understood as knowledge and which knowledge is authorized by whom is influenced by social, political, and historical conditions. The idea of knowledge is fundamentally ideological. There is huge structural power in the authorizing, audibility, and nomination – as well as the deauthorization, delegitimization, hierarchizing, and (de-)valuation – of knowledge. The groups that determine what is considered knowledge and which knowledge is recognized as a guiding principle for action, being ethically and morally desirable as well as legally binding, are tremendously and violently impacting the lives or non-lives of other humans, creatures, and nature. Epistemic violence is therefore all-encompassing, fundamental, and at the same time evasive, as it is inherent to social structure and a base for our collective understanding as a society. Very few authors therefore debate the linguistic aspects of knowledge as an integral part of epistemic power. Because of this I will follow two different tracks in this chapter's second half in order to address different areas of the larger concept of language and make it analytically applicable.

Knowing Violence

A first dimension of the connection between language and epistemic violence is the linguistic expression of knowledge. This includes explicit violent speech acts (so called pejoratization or German: *Pejorisierung*, cf. Hornscheidt 2011), which are also possibly closest to an everyday discussion of the idea of linguistic violence. Widening this approach then also means including not only what is said but also what is un-said, re-nounced, or de-named.[3]

A second level of knowing violence in language is the presumed possibility to talk about violence: violence can be put into words – even if only after the fact – as is important in the context of epistemic violence. Epistemic violence can be expressed retrospectively, analytically, and meta-reflexively. This, problematically, means that any reflection may be stuck in the paradox that any form of post-phrasing will necessarily occur in a space of knowledge authorization, e.g. Universities or other research institutes, that may be an institutionalized or societally legitimized space of epistemic violence.[4]

Beyond this assumed expressability there is a third dimension of epistemic violence where precisely what is deemed unspeakable becomes unimaginable and unintelligible time and time again.

So, what could this unintelligible exclusion from what is considered to be knowledge, in a society at a specific time, be? What lies beyond the battlefield of socially relevant, legitimate, and socially accepted knowledge? Because in omission, in the denouncing of relevance and validity, and in the de-normalization of specific modes of knowledge (production) lies a recognition of their existence through their explicit denomination. This third dimension of epistemic knowledge through speech acts – knowledge that is made de-un-intelligible – can be precisely analyzed through constructivist speech analyses.

In the following I will shortly address concrete examples of speech acts and the re-production of epistemic knowledge, in order to demonstrate the complexity of violence as such and of its intertwined strategies. This will be exemplified with the question of verbalized social categorizations.

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3 Un-said refers to the omission of priviledged postions, while re-nounced, and dis-mentioned refers to a refusal or avoidance of acknowledging discriminated positions. The German term "Entnennung" was coined by Hornscheidt (2005), "Ent-Erwähnung" by Lockward (2010).

4 The bashing of Gender Studies as a research and study subject by rightwing parties and groups can be understood as a violent expression and a power claim regarding the canon of what is considered academic knowledge (and what is considered ideology) and what can or can't be institutionalized at universities. The highly ideological charge of this attempted delegitimization of Gender Studies by rightwing actors with a strongly ideologized concept of knowledge is apparent and comes to the fore as paradox specifically through the attempt of assigning Gender Studies ideological qualities (and neutralizing their own stance with this rhetorical gesture).

Social Categorizations

Verbalized social categorizations are the organizational patterns of society. They enable interactive identification, simultaneously facilitating a sense of belonging and a specification of difference, thereby demarcating and excluding. Social categorizations are significant to society. The categorizations that I am specifically interested in are those established through structural violence, or rather those through which structural violence manifests itself. The levels of structural violence I refer to here are colonial racism, antisemitism, nationalism, genderism, and dis-abling. In other words, this means the collective and identificational assignment of people to groups of race, religion, nationality, gender, or ability.

Verbalized social categorizations that operate through these power structures are, in my constructivist view, always also re-actions to or the long-term products of structural violence. This leads us to the paradox that we often have to reiterate these categories in our language in order to address discrimination. Yet by doing so, a central dimension of discrimination becomes reified: that of the linguistic differentiation into distinctly named groups. Social categorizations can never evade fundamental structural violence, but are in fact conditioned by it, reiterate it constantly, and re-affirm its power, even if their aim is to work against it. Social categorizations as (self-)descriptions would not exist without the structural violence precluding linguistic differentialization and therefore affirmation. The current consensus is that sorting people by race is racist. Assuming, and academically justifying, the idea of different human races – supported by epistemic violence – is now considered unscientific.[5] All categorization of people by race is at heart racist – no matter how the different groups are then connoted, valued, and hierarchized. Likewise, any differentiation between abled and dis-abled people puts the discrimination, created *by* that differentiation, onto the people. But people are not dis-abled, they are labelled as dis-abled by society. The same argument can be made for gender: sorting people into gender groups is a fundamental part of structural violence manifesting itself and becoming uncontestable.

As part of structural violence, social categorizations develop their own dynamic. They are de-historicized and are thus moved towards universal status. Revealing this process is an important task in critical, constructivist speech analyses and a crucial part in the deconstruction of epistemic violence.

In the following examples, I will specifically seek out more subtle forms of epistemic violence performed in language practices as well as hone in on the linguistic acts in creating memory as the creation of temporal dimensions.

Let me start with an everyday negotiation of antisemitism in the German speaking public. In different media outlets, image captions, exhibitions, or school-

5 Science as such is not under scrutiny in this scenario. The system of the authorization of specific forms of knowledge hence remains intact.

books we can find statements like: "*Because* his father was a Hungarian *Jew*, the family *had to leave* Berlin within 24 hours in 1939."

The social category is established as preexisting and axiomatic, and the structures of discrimination and antisemitism remain unnamed. Nobody had to leave Berlin because their relatives were Jewish, they had to leave because Germany was antisemitic. The personal categorization 'Jew' was used as part of antisemitism and pared down to a definition created by the national-socialist ideology. People were then categorized in a racist way using this label. As such labels persist in cultural narratives and media, this narrow definition and the genocide of those people categorized as Jewish following the national-socialist party's criteria still informs, what is understood as 'Jewish'. The implied connotations have engraved themselves and been engraved into the structures of knowledge and today's interpretation of what the personal appellation 'Jew' means in German speaking countries.

Structural discrimination violently and powerfully inscribes itself into societal normalized knowledge about identities and social categories through the specification of collective categories that the discrimination created in the first place. They are then no longer seen as effects of discriminatory structures but taken as *a priori* in common knowledge. Why is this relevant? Let me demonstrate my point with a few quotes from literature using the antisemitically charged category of 'Jewish'.

Katja Petrowskaja writes about the memories of herself and her family in her autobiography, titled "Maybe Esther" (2015). In a chapter about a visit in Babi Jar she reflects on the layers, stories, and histories in the remembrance of violence:

> "Does a place stay the same place if, at this place, people murder, bury, blast, hollow out, burn, grind up, scatter, hold their tongues, plant, lie, create landfills and backfills, fill up with concrete, once again hold their tongues, block off, arrest mourners, and then later construct then monuments, commemorate their own victims once a year, or think they have nothing to do with it? […] Most people talk about these victims as Jews, often meaning simply 'the others'. That is misleading, for those who had to die were not the others; they were, rather, friends from school, kids next door, neighbors, grandmas and uncles, biblical elders and their Soviet grandchildren, who were last seen on September 29 on the streets of Kiev in an endless train of their own funeral procession along Bolshaya Zhitormiskaya." (Ibid.: 164-165)

The social category 'Jews' – defined, written in stone, and essentialized by the Nazi regime, in order to forcefully tie antisemitism as a naturalized attribute to bodies and people – simultaneously lead to an alienation, an Othering, a distance in the collective memory. The quote shows how these forms of collective memory seep into even this smallest units of language's knowledge production.

"I have never understood", Petrowskaja continues, "why this misfortune should always be the misfortune of the others." (2018: 165) Throung the unchallenged use

of these discriminatory, absolute social categorizations, racism gains a life of its own that seems so natural and self-explanatory that the inherent structural violence is unnoticeable and has become the condition for any conversation *about* the discrimination. When people are perceived as primarily part of social groups which are embedded in a regime of discrimination – and not as individuals or with a focus on the distinct individual relationship to a person when addressing them – this can be taken as a tangible linguistic sign of structural discrimination.

One's own identity is always a battle field when structurally discriminated against. This becomes apparent in a scene from Marion Brasch's autobiographical family story (2013). The author and her father, both living in the GDR, are standing at Marx's grave in London:

> "'When we arrived here, I was still a catholic', my father said. 'I wanted to become a priest, do you remember?'
> Of course, I remembered.
> 'It took me long time, to bide farewell to my god. I kind of put him in a dinghy and pulled him along for quite a while, but here I cut the cord' he says softly. We stood in silence at the Marx grave for a while.
> 'And what about your Judaism, dad?' I asked him after a while. His gaze came back to the present.
> 'What about it?', he answered irritatedly.
> 'I was only ever a Jew according to the Nazis' racial laws. This never meant anything to me. I was a catholic, now I am a communist.'
> 'But you had to leave Germany as a Jew. And if it weren't for that, there would have been no dinghy, and you wouldn't have become a communist, right?'
> 'Had, were, if', my father coolly replied, 'hadn't I have been a Jew, many things would have gone differently.'" (Ibid.: 294-295 translation A.G.)

Another linguistically obvious marker for structural racism could be when people can no longer decide if or how they can relate to a category as it has become so almighty and unavoidable for their own cognition and that of the others that people simply cannot avoid it and all its existential consequences.

This holds especially true for the category of gender. First of all, humans are – usually at birth – categorized by others in one of two, maybe three, groups of gender, based on medical indications. Second of all, from this moment on there is no option for a gender free life: regardless of how you define yourself, most people will project their gender expectations onto you at first glance. There are different lifestyle, medical, and legal options for changing one's gender, but there is no way to opt out of the categorization created by genderism. The categories are deeply entrenched in our social constructs and receive constant reference an everyone, like it or not, has to continually realte to them (cf. Hornscheidt/Oppenländer 2019).

Without language, without the potential to create, use, and take for granted linguistic categories such as gender, nationality, disability, residency, and solidifying them by describing people as *woman, tran*, man, German, Syrian, Somalian, Swiss,* or *stateless*, the respective structural discriminations would not exist. They can only exist, if the social sorting of people into these categories continues. This is also what I read into a paragraph from Deborah Feldman's autobiography:

> "Sitting at the table under the neon lights and cleaning the cabbage from grubs, that would make it *treife*, non-kosher, Bubby absentmindedly says, that Yaweh has only put the other people on this planet so they could hate and persecute the Jewish people. After all, it is this opposing force that defines us, just like Yaweh created day and night, darkness and light. One is necessary to define the other. Our Jewishness exists precisely within the framework of the attempts to extinguish it." (13, translation A.G.)

Being-Jewish, exists as a racist, violent categorization and valuation because other, mutually exclusive collective categories exist simultaneously. Collectively they unfold a difference, often imagined as natural, between racial groups, national groups, gender groups, and people, who are dis-abled or abled. Such socially collective allocations are a matter of power. This power is often enacted by naturalizing structural violence, which becomes indiscernible as violence, against all of society. This level of subtle, epistemic violence that evades social detection as violence is the most powerful of all violences.

Shohat/Stam (2012: 92) makes a case for a clearer understanding of social categories as relational and contingent, always prior, and always embedded into concrete social and history situations. Similar to how I understand Petrowskaja's pledge for the denormalization of social categories. Marica Bodrožić writes in her travel report *Mein weißer Frieden (My white peace):*

> "People, who never in their lives find their own language, can be easily seduced by the speeches of the powerful. When they submit themselves to them, they also acquire access to their power and their (however shaped) ability to speak, that they themselves don't have." (2014: 193, translation A.G.)

Part of symbolic power is the normalization and naturalization of linguistic categories and labelling of people into collectives. This enables and dis-ables potential actualizations of people as part of social groups. In this perspective, socially standardized speech acts are an essential base of collective, and common knowledge.

Petran and Thiel (2012) conclude that a symbolic order is necessary in order for power relations to stabilize as it makes specific kinds of violence feasible and then produces and legitimizes such violence. Their example is sexualized violence against women, lesbian, gay, and trans*people, with the categories themselves establishing people as open to being hurt.

In this chapter I have explicitly focused on aspects of symbolic order and how some of them are stabilized while others are rendered unimaginable because they are re-nounced. To this end I have employed the concepts of symbolic, subtle and epistemic violence.

Translated by Anne Ganzert

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