

Subordinating Speech and Linguistic Context

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In this talk, I will show how a certain kind of propaganda, which following Rad Langton I will call subordinating speech, exploits a number of recently carved theoretical distinctions in formal semantics and formal pragmatics. I will show how propaganda exploits the distinction between at-issue content and not-at-issue content. I will show that we need to recognize imperative like effects on the common ground even in what are superficially assertions, and how tools developed by Sarah Murray, Will Starr, and Eric Swanson's recent work can help illuminate how propaganda works. Finally I will draw a Gricean conclusion: that an understanding of propaganda requires us to be able to distinguish what is said, the at issue content, from the not-at-issue content of an utterance. I will thus defend a political version of Grice's point that an understanding of non-literal speech presupposes an account of literal speech.