



**SOCIAL LINGUISTICS
AND LITERACIES**
IDEOLOGY IN DISCOURSES

THIRD EDITION

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Discourses and literacies

The New Literacy Studies

In Chapter 4, I argued that a new field of study has emerged around the notion of literacy, a field I called “the New Literacy Studies.” It is a problem, of course, to call any enterprise “new,” because, of course, it soon becomes “old.” Were it not so cumbersome, it would be better to call the field something like “integrated social-cultural-political-historical literacy studies,” which names the viewpoint it takes on literacy. However, for better or worse, the term New Literacy Studies has become well known and widely used, so, reluctantly, I will continue to use the term.

In this chapter, I develop a particular viewpoint on literacy and the New Literacy Studies by alternating theoretical discussion with specific case studies meant to exemplify the theory. One way we can begin to develop a sociocultural approach to literacy is to engage in the rhetorical conceit of imagining that we have been asked: “What does the word ‘literacy’ mean?” Immediately we will see that in order to define “literacy” adequately we must first discuss a few other concepts which are commonly misconstrued. One of these is “language.”

“Language” can be a misleading term: It is often used to mean the grammar (structure, the “rules”) of a language. However, it is a truism, but one we nonetheless must hold constantly in mind, that a person can know the grammar of a language and still not know how to use that language (Gumperz 1982a, b; Hanks 1996; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Wolfson 1989). What is important in communication is not speaking grammatically, but saying the “right” thing at the “right” time and in the “right” place. If I enter my neighborhood biker bar and say to my tattooed drinking buddy, as I sit down, “May I have a match please?” my grammar is perfect, but what I have said is wrong nonetheless. The situation requires something more like “Gotta match?”

Research on second language acquisition both inside and outside classroom settings indicates that some speakers can have quite poor grammar and still function in communication and socialization quite well (Huebner 1983). They know how to use the language, even if all their forms are not "correct." So **what counts is use, not grammar *per se*.**

However, it is less often remarked that a person could even be able to use a language perfectly and still not make sense. Use alone is not enough. Paradoxically put: **a person can speak a language grammatically, can use the language appropriately, and still get it "wrong."** This is so because what is important is not just how you say it, not just language in any sense, but *who* you are and *what* you're doing when you say it.

If I enter my neighborhood biker bar and say to my drinking buddy, as I sit down, "Gotta match?" or "Gimme a match, wouldya?" while placing a napkin on the bar stool to avoid getting my newly pressed designer jeans dirty, I have said the right thing. My "language-in-use" is just fine. But my "saying-doing" combination is, nonetheless, all wrong. My words, however appropriately formulated for the situation, do not "fit" with my actions, and, in the case of socially situated language, "fit" between words and actions is all important (Gee 1992; Goffman 1959, 1967, 1981; Gumperz 1982a, b; Hanks 1996).

In fact, the matter goes further: It is not just language and action which must "fit" together appropriately. **In socially situated language use one must simultaneously say the "right" thing, do the "right" thing, and in such saying and doing also express the "right" beliefs, values, and attitudes.**

Any time we act or speak, we must accomplish two things: (1) **We must make clear *who* we are, and (2) we must make clear *what* we are doing** (Wieder and Pratt 1990a). We are each of us not a single *who*, but different *whos* in different contexts. In addition, one and the same act can count as different things in different contexts, where context is something people actively construe, negotiate over, and change their minds about (Duranti 1997; Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

An example of language use and types of people

Let me give a concrete example of the way in which language must not only have the right grammar and be used appropriately, but must also express the right values, beliefs, and attitudes. **the "right *who*," the right "type" of person.** In a paper arguing the importance of using language appropriately, F. Niyi Akinnaso and Cheryl Seabrook Ajiroto (1982)

present “simulated job interviews” (practice sessions) from two African-American mothers in a US job training program. I reprint these two interviews below.

Though the interviews are from two different women, Akinlajo and Ajirotutu present these two interviews as “before and after” cases. That is, the first one is presented as an example of how not to carry out an interview, and the second is presented as the correct way to do it, the successful result of having been properly trained in the job training program. In the texts below, material between two slashes represents one “tone group”—a set of words said with one unitary intonational contour—and dots represent pauses, with the greater number of dots equaling a longer pause:

Job interview text 1

Question: Have you had any previous job experience that would demonstrate that you’ve shown initiative or been able to work independently?

- 1 Well / . . . yes when I / . . . OK / . . . there’s this Walgreen’s Agency /
- 2 I worked as a microfilm operator / OK /
- 3 And it was a snow storm /
- 4 OK / and it was usually six people / workin’ in a group /
- 5 uhuh / and only me and this other girl showed up /
- 6 and we had quite a lot of work to do /
- 7 and so the man / he asked us could we / you know / do we / . . . do we think we could finish this work /
- 9 so me ‘n’ this girl / you know / we finished it all /

Job interview text 2

Question: One more question was that ah, that kind of work frequently involves using your own initiative and showing sort of the ability to make independent judgment. Do you have any . . . can you tell me about any previous experience which you think directly show . . . demonstrates that you have these qualities?

- 1 Why / .. well / as far as being capable of handling an office /
- 2 say if I’m left on my own /
- 3 I feel I’m capable /

- 1 I had a situation where one of my employers that I've been
 5 ah previously worked for /
 6 had to go on / a .. / a trip for say / ah three weeks and /
 7 he was / . . . I was left alone to .. / handle the office and run it /
 8 And at that time / ah I didn't really have what you would say /
 a lot of experience /
 9 But I had enough experience to / .. deal with any situations that
 came up while he was gone /
 10 and those that I couldn't / handle at the time /
 11 if there was someone who had more experience than myself /
 12 I asked questions / to find out / what procedure I would use /
 13 If something came up / and if I didn't know / who to really go
 to /
 14 I would jot it down / or write it down / on a piece of paper /
 15 so that I wouldn't forget that .. /
 16 if anyone that / was more qualified than myself /
 17 I could ask them about it /
 18 and how I would go about solving it /
 19 So I feel I'm capable of handling just about any situation /
 20 whether it's on my own / or under supervision

The first woman is simply using the “wrong” grammar (the wrong “dialect”) for this type of middle-class interview. It’s a perfectly good dialect (see discussion in Chapter 1 above and Labov 1972a; Rickford and Rickford 2000), but it is not the dialect normally used for job interviews, in part, of course, due to prejudice. In our society, you are expected to use “Standard” English for most job interviews, so this woman’s grammar doesn’t “fit” the context (Ericksen and Schultz 1982; Gumperz *et al.* 1979; Roberts *et al.* 1992).

The second woman, the “success case,” has not got a real problem with her grammar. (Remember this is speech, not writing.) Her grammar is, for the most part, perfectly normal “standard” English. Nor is there any real problem with the use to which she puts that grammar; all her sentences are formulated appropriately for the time, place, and occasion in which she is speaking (except the “say” in line 6, which sounds like she is “estimating” or “imagining,” rather than “reporting”).

However, she still is getting it “wrong” in a sense. This is so because she is, in the act of using the “right” grammar in the “right” way, nonetheless expressing the wrong values. She opens by saying that she is capable of handling an office on her own. In fact, she goes on to say that though she did not have a lot of experience, she had enough experience to deal

with “any situations that came up” while her boss was away. But then she immediately (in line 10) brings up “those that I couldn’t handle,” which seems to contradict, and certainly mitigates, her claim that she could handle anything that came up. She proceeds (in lines 11 and 12) to elaborate on her inexperience and lack of knowledge by saying that she asked questions of those with more experience than herself. (We might begin to wonder why they weren’t left in charge.)

Any chance we could construe this last point as, at least, “responsible humility” is destroyed as she goes on (in lines 13–18) to mention not just things she doesn’t know how to handle, but things she doesn’t even know who to ask about (and in line 16 once again mentions people more qualified than herself). The whole second part of her answer (after line 9) involves her search for people more knowledgeable than herself whose superior knowledge can supplement her lack of knowledge. In fact, for her, “responsibility,” “initiative,” and “independent judgment” amount to deferring to “other people’s” knowledge.

Her response closes (in lines 19 and 20), as is fully appropriate to such interview talk, with a return to her original point: “So I feel I’m capable of handling just about any situation, whether it’s on my own, or under supervision.” But this is contradicted by the very attitudes and values she has just allowed us to infer that she holds. She seems to view being left in charge as just another form of supervision, namely, supervision by “other people’s” knowledge and expertise. Though this woman starts and finishes in an appropriate fashion, she fails in the heart of the narrative to characterize her own expertise in the overly optimistic form called for by such interviews (Erickson and Schultz 1982). She is expressing herself, for this time and place, as the wrong sort of person for the job. Using this response as an example of “successful training” is possible only because the authors, well aware that language is more than grammar (namely, *use*), are unaware that communication is more than language use.

The moral of the above discussion is that what is important is language *plus* being the “right” *who* (sort of person) doing the “right” *what* (activity). What is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but saying(writing)–doing–being–valuing–believing combinations. These combinations I will refer to as Discourses, with a capital “D,” a notion I want now to explicate (Gee 1992, 2005). Before I do that, let me point out that I will use “discourse” with a little “d” for language in use or connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays, and so forth. So, “discourse” is part of “Discourse”—“Discourse” with a big “D” is always more than just language.

Read:

Discourses

A Discourse with a capital "D" is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities. These identities might be things like being—doing a Los Angeles Latino street-gang member, a Los Angeles policeman, a field biologist, a first-grade student in a specific classroom and school, a "SPED" student, a certain type of doctor, lawyer, teacher, African-American, worker in a "quality control" workplace, man, woman, boyfriend, girlfriend, or regular at the local bar, etc. and etc. through a nearly endless list. Discourses are all about how people "get their acts together" to get recognized as a given kind of person at a specific time and place.

The whole point of talking about Discourses is to focus on the fact that **when people mean things to each other, there is always more than language at stake.** To mean anything to someone else (or even to myself) I have to communicate who I am (in the sense of what socially situated identity am I taking on here and now) and what I am doing in terms of what socially situated activity I am carrying out (Wieder and Pratt, 1990). Language is, as we have seen, not enough for this. We have to get our minds and deeds "right," as well. We also have to get ourselves appropriately in sync with various objects, tools, places, technologies, and other people. Being in a Discourse is being able to engage in a particular sort of "dance" with words, deeds, values, feelings, other people, objects, tools, technologies, places and times so as to get recognized as a distinctive sort of *who* doing a distinctive sort of *what*. Being able to understand a Discourse is being able to recognize such "dances."

Imagine what an identity kit to play the role of Sherlock Holmes would involve: certain clothes, certain ways of using language (oral language and print), certain attitudes and beliefs, allegiance to a certain lifestyle, and certain ways of interacting with others. We can call all these factors together, as they are integrated around the identity of "Sherlock Holmes, Master Detective" the "Sherlock Holmes Discourse." This example also makes clear that "Discourse," as I am using the term, does not involve just talk or just language.

The woman in the job interview was in danger of failing to be the "right kind of person" for entry into specific business and work-centered Discourses. She needed to signal that she was "responsible" even when

the job she would be given would in all likelihood have given her little real responsibility. Her success at the social practice of job interviewing would simply have signaled that she had allegiance to certain middle-class values and was to be “trusted” not to disrupt the workings of power within the workplace and the wider society.

We are all multiple kinds of people. I use different combinations of words, deeds, attitudes, props (e.g., chalk, classrooms, sitting arrangements in office hours), and values to be a “professor” than I do to be a “bird watcher” or “(video) gamer,” but I am all three and many other kinds as well, some of which are very hard to name (e.g., “first-generation middle-class baby boomer with class resentment”), but not all that hard to recognize. I once knew very well how, in words, deeds, attitudes, props (e.g., statues, pews, holy water, cassocks), and values, to “pull off” being a devout Catholic and knew well how to recognize (and police) others who attempted to “pull off” that identity. I don’t any longer.

Discourses are not units or tight boxes with neat boundaries. Rather they are *ways of recognizing and getting recognized* as certain sorts of *whos* doing certain sorts of *whats*. One and the same “dance” can get recognized in multiple ways, in partial ways, in contradictory ways, in disputed ways, in negotiable ways, and so on and so forth through all the multiplicities and problematics that work on postmodernism has made so popular. Discourses are matters of enactment and recognition, then.

All recognition processes involve satisfying a variety of constraints in probabilistic and sometimes partial ways. For example, something recognized as a “weapon” (e.g., a baseball bat or a fireplace poker) may share some features with prototypical weapons (like a gun, sword, or club) and not share other features. And there may be debate about the matter. Furthermore, the very same thing might be recognized as a weapon in one context and not in another. So, too, with being in and out of Discourses, e.g., enacting and recognizing being—doing a certain type of street gang member, Special Ed student, or particle physicist.

While there are an endless array of Discourses in the world, nearly all human beings, except under extraordinary conditions, acquire an initial Discourse within whatever constitutes their primary socializing unit early in life. Early in life, we all learn a culturally distinctive way of being an “everyday person”—that is, a non-specialized, non-professional person. We can call this our “primary Discourse.” Our primary Discourse gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular language (our “everyday language”), the language in which we speak and act as “everyday” (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity.

As a person grows up, lots of interesting things can happen to his or her primary Discourse. Primary Discourses can change, hybridize with other Discourses, and they can even die. In any case, for the vast majority of us, our primary Discourse, through all its transformations, serves us throughout life as what I will call our "lifeworld Discourse" (Habermas 1984). Our lifeworld Discourse is the way that we use language, feel and think, act and interact, and so forth, in order to be an "everyday" (non-specialized) person. In our plural world there is much adjustment and negotiation as people seek to meet in the terrain of the lifeworld, given that lifeworlds are culturally distinctive (that is, different groups of people have different ways of being-doing "everyday people").

All the Discourses we acquire later in life, beyond our primary Discourse, we acquire within a more "public sphere" than our initial socializing group. We can call these "secondary Discourses." They are acquired within institutions that are part and parcel of wider communities, whether these be religious groups, community organizations, schools, businesses, or governments.

As we are being socialized early in life, secondary Discourses very often play an interesting role. Primary Discourses work out, over time, alignments and allegiances with and against other Discourses, alignments and allegiances that shape them as they, in turn, shape these other Discourses. One way that many social groups achieve an alignment with secondary Discourses they value is by incorporating certain aspects of the practices of these secondary Discourses into the early (primary Discourse) socialization of their children. For example, some African-American families incorporate aspects of practices and values that are part of African-American churches into their primary Discourse (Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1977), as my family incorporated aspects of practices and values of a very traditional Catholicism into our primary Discourse. This is an extremely important mechanism in terms of which bits and pieces of a valued "community" or "public" identity (to be more fully practiced later in the child's life) is incorporated as part and parcel of the child's "private," "home-based," lifeworld identity.

Social groups that are deeply affiliated with formal schooling often incorporate into the socialization of their children practices that resonate with later school-based secondary Discourses (e.g., see Rogoff and Toma 1997). For example, their children from an early age are encouraged (and coached) at dinner time to tell stories in quite expository ways that are rather like little essays, or parents interact with their children over books in ways that encourage a great deal of labeling and the answering of a

variety of different types of questions, as well as the forming of intertextual relationships between books and between books and the world. Of course, this fact has been a mainstay of the literature on school failure.

I refer to the process by which families incorporate aspects of valued secondary-Discourse practices into their primary Discourses as “early borrowing.” Early borrowing is used as a way to facilitate children’s later success in valued secondary Discourses. I want to stress the following point: *Early borrowing functions not primarily to give children certain skills, but, rather, to give them certain values, attitudes, motivations, ways of interacting, and perspectives, all of which are more important than mere skills for successful later entry into specific secondary Discourses “for real.” (Skills follow from such matters.)*

There are, of course, complex relationships between people’s primary Discourses and the secondary ones they are acquiring, as well as among their academic, institutional, and community-based secondary Discourses. These interactions crucially effect what happens to people when they are attempting to acquire new Discourses. Early borrowing is one of these relationships. Others involve forms of resistance, opposition, domination, on the one hand, or of alliance and complicity, on the other, among Discourses.

On being a “real Indian”

I am arguing, then, that we must always act, think, value, and interact in ways that together with language render *who* we are and *who* we are doing recognizable to others (and ourselves). As we have seen, to be a particular *who* and to pull off a particular *what* requires that we act, value, interact, and use language in sync with, in coordination with, others, as well as with various objects (“props”) in appropriate locations and at appropriate times (Gee 1992–93; Knorr Cetina 1992; Latour 1987, 2005). All this is rather abstract, so let me turn to a specific example.

To see this wider notion of language as integrated with “other stuff” (other people, objects, values, times and places) in Discourses, I will briefly consider Wieder and Pratt’s fascinating work on how American Indians (from a wide variety of different groups or “tribes”) recognize each other as “really Indian” (Wieder and Pratt 1990a, b; Pratt 1985). Wieder and Pratt’s work, of course, was done in 1990. Discourses change—as we will see later, they change in reaction to other Discourses—so the claims we discuss are not meant necessarily to apply to all Native Americans at all times. Nonetheless, Wieder and Pratt’s work, based on close ethnographic observations, is a good example of how Discourses work.

Native Americans, at least of the sort Wieder and Pratt studied, “refer to persons who are ‘really Indian’ in just those words with regularity and standardization” (Wieder and Pratt, 1990a: 48). This example will also make yet clearer how the identities (the *whos*) we take on are not rigidly set by the states of our minds or bodies, but are, rather, flexibly negotiated in actual contexts of practice.

The problem of “recognition and being recognized” is very consequential and problematic for Indians. While one must be able to make some claims to kinship with others who are recognized as “real Indians,” this by no means settles the matter. People with such (biological) ties can fail to get recognized as “really Indian,” and people of mixed kinship (white and Indian) can be so recognized.

Being a real Indian is not something one can simply be. Rather, it is something that one becomes or is in the “doing” of it, that is, in the performance (for this general perspective, see Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984; Heritage and Maynard 2006). Though one must have certain kinship ties to get in the “game,” beyond this entry criterion there is no being (once and for all) a real Indian, rather there is only doing being-or-becoming-a-real-Indian. If one does not continue to “practice” being a real Indian, one ceases to be a real Indian. Finally, “doing” being-and-becoming-a-real-Indian is not something that one can do all by oneself. It requires the participation of other Indians. One cannot be a real Indian unless one appropriately recognizes real Indians and gets recognized as a real Indian in the practices of doing being-and-becoming-a-real-Indian. Being a real Indian also requires appropriate accompanying objects (props), times, and places.

There are a multitude of ways one can do being-and-becoming-a-real-Indian. Some of these are (following Wieder and Pratt, see also Scollon and Scollon 1981): Real Indians prefer to avoid conversation with strangers, Indian or otherwise. They cannot be related to one another as “mere acquaintances,” as some non-Indians might put it. So, for real Indians, any conversation they do have with a stranger, who may turn out to be a real Indian will, in the discovery of the other’s Indianness, establish substantial obligations between the conversational partners just through the mutual acknowledgment that they are Indians and that they are now no longer strangers to one another.

In their search for the other’s real Indianness and in their display of their own Indianness, real Indians frequently proceed to engage in a distinctive form of verbal sparring. By correctly responding to and correctly engaging in this sparring, which Indians call “razzing,” each participant further establishes cultural competency in the eyes of the other.

Real Indians manage face-to-face relations with others in such a way that they appear to be in agreement with them (or, at least, they do not overtly disagree); they are modest and "fit in." They show accord and harmony and are reserved about their own interests, skills, attainments, and positions. Real Indians understand that they should not elevate themselves over other real Indians. And they understand that the complex system of obligations they have to kin and other real Indians takes priority over those contractual obligations and pursuit of self-interest that some non-Indians prize so highly.

Real Indians must be competent in "doing their part" in participating in conversations that begin with the participants exchanging greetings and other amenities and then lapsing into extended periods of silence. They must know that neither they nor the other have an obligation to speak—that silence on the part of all conversants is permissible.

When they are among Indians, real Indians must also be able to perform in the roles of "student" and "teacher" and be able to recognize the behaviors appropriate to these roles. These roles are brought into play exclusively when the appropriate occasion arises for transmitting cultural knowledge (i.e., things pertinent to being a real Indian). Although many non-Indians find it proper to ask questions of someone who is instructing them, Indians regard questions in such a situation as being inattentive, rude, insolent, and so forth. The person who has taken the role of "student" shows attentiveness by avoiding eye contact and by being silent. The teaching situation then, as a witnessed monologue, lacks the dialogical features that characterize much of Western instruction.

A very wide variety of gatherings provides the occasion for public speaking. Only elder males may speak for themselves as well as for others in the fashion of addressing the gathering. Younger males and all women must seek out an elder male who will "talk for" or "speak for them," if they have something they want to say.

While the above sort of information gives us something of the flavor of what sorts of things one must do and say to get recognized as a "real Indian," such information can lead to a bad mistake. It can sound as if the above features are necessary and sufficient criteria for doing being-and-becoming-a-real-Indian. But this is not true. The above features are not a test that can be or ever is administered all at once, and once and for all, to determine who is or is not a real Indian. Rather, the circumstances under which these features are employed by Indians emerge over the course of a developing history among groups of people. They are employed always in the context of actual situations, and at different times in the life history of groups of people. The ways in which the judgment

"He (or she) is (or is not) a real Indian" is embedded within situations that motivate it make such judgments intrinsically provisional. Those now recognized can spoil their acceptance or have it spoiled and those not now accepted can have another chance even when others do not want to extend it.

The same thing applies, in fact, in regard to many other social identities, not just being "a real Indian" (e.g., McCall 1995). There are no all-at-once, once-and-for-all, tests for who is adept at physics or literature or being a member of a Los Angeles street gang, or a lawyer. These matters are settled provisionally as part and parcel of shared histories and on-going activities. It is the fact that school so often does not function in this way—for example, in school we very often act as if there are all-at-once, and once-and-for-all, tests of identity (e.g., "good reader," "SPED student," "gifted," "low achieving," etc.)—that helps to make school such a strange place for many children and adults.

Discourses again

To sum up, then, by "a Discourse" I will mean:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or "social network," to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful "role," or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognizable fashion.

There are number of important points that one can make about Discourses (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 2003; Gee 1992; Hodge and Kress 1988; Jameson 1981; Kress 1985; Lee 1992; Macdonell 1986; Thompson 1984):

- 1 Discourses are inherently "ideological" in the sense in which I have defined that term in the first chapter. They crucially involve a set of values and viewpoints about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods, at the very least about who is an insider and who isn't, often who is "normal" and who isn't, and often, too, many other things as well.
- 2 Discourses are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny, since uttering viewpoints that seriously undermine them defines one as

- being outside them. The Discourse itself defines what counts as acceptable criticism.
- 3 Discourse-defined positions from which to speak and behave are not, however, just defined as internal to a Discourse, but also as standpoints taken up by the Discourse in its relation to other, ultimately opposing, Discourses. The Discourse we identify with being a feminist is radically changed if all male Discourses disappear. The Discourse of a regular drinking group at a bar is partly defined by its points of opposition to a variety of other viewpoints (non-drinkers, people who dislike bars as places of meeting people, "Yuppies," and so forth).
 - 4 Any Discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints, and values at the expense of others. In doing so it will marginalize viewpoints and values central to other Discourses. In fact, a Discourse can call for one to accept values in conflict with other Discourses of which one is also a member (see below for more on this).
 - 5 Finally, Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society, which is why they are always and everywhere ideological. Control over certain Discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society. These Discourses empower those groups who have the least conflicts with their other Discourses when they use them. Let us call Discourses that lead to social goods in a society dominant Discourses and let us refer to those groups that have the fewest conflicts when using them as dominant groups. Obviously these are both matters of degree and change to a certain extent in different contexts.

All Discourses are the products of history (see Foucault 1966, 1969, 1973, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1985 and Fleck 1979). It is sometimes helpful to say that it is not individuals who speak and act, but rather that historically and socially defined Discourses speak to each other through individuals. The individual instantiates, gives body to a Discourse every time he or she acts or speaks, and thus carries it, and ultimately changes it, through time. Americans tend to be very focused on the individual, and thus often miss the fact that the individual is the meeting point of many, sometimes conflicting, socially and historically defined Discourses (see the next chapter for examples).

The discourse of law school

Once again we have gotten rather abstract, and I want therefore to develop a specific example—this time an example relevant to the conflicts between Discourses that can inhabit one and the same person. I will take as my example the Discourse of law school in the United States. This example will, in addition, show how literacy practices of quite specific sorts are embedded in Discourses. My discussion here is based on the work of Michele Minnis (1994; all page references below are to this article). Again, I caution that Discourses change—and, indeed, some law schools have sought to reform their pedagogies based on the sorts of things people like Minnis have discovered—but, again, too, Minnis's work was based on close ethnographic observations.

In the typical law school, instruction in the first year involves total immersion in the course material. Teachers do not lecture in class, rather they engage in adversarial interactions with students patterned after those of judge and lawyer in appellate courtrooms. **The dominant instructional approach is the "case method."** This method consists in **discussing and comparing appellate opinions through a question-and-answer routine sometimes called "Socratic dialogue":**

Before every class meeting, students are expected to have read and briefed, or summarized in writing, several appellate opinions from a book containing pivotal case law on the course topic. When called on in class, students must be prepared to review and analyze specific opinions, compare the details of several opinions, and explain how the opinions might have been rendered differently.

The burden of divining pattern in the entire body of cases is on the students. Typically the professor's role is to expose, in the student's presentations, the hazards of ignoring alternative interpretations of the case material. Students are advised to be alert and ready to duck or strike lest their adversary, the professor, catch them off guard. In other words, law school classes, much like those in the martial arts, are run as a kind of contest between opponents. Always, discussion in such classes is exegetical; it is anchored in texts, in written accounts and judgments of past events (pp. 352–353).

To write a competent brief the student has to be able to read the text being briefed in much the same way as the professor does. Student readers must know how such texts are structured. They must know, for example, how sentence structure in such texts is used to signal emphasis,

importance, and other communicative effects. They must also see "some statements as relatively general (or relatively specific) renderings of others, some ideas and discussions as subparts of others, and the whole of an exposition as integrated by an organizing idea" (p. 356). And they must do this in order ultimately to see and be able to summarize the argument the text propounds.

Students are not taught these reading skills—the ones necessary for them to be able to write briefs—directly. Briefs are not, for instance, turned in to the professor; they are written for the students' own use in class. "The feedback students receive on their briefs is provided indirectly and to everyone at once, through analysis of the briefed cases in class" (p. 357). This sort of indirect feedback is quite unlikely to involve overt attention to structural patterns and writing conventions, let alone reading conventions. Nonetheless, these must be "picked up," along with (and actually as part and parcel of) concepts, values, and ways of interacting that are specific to the legal domain.

In law school, then, the traditional instructional methods do not describe or explicate procedures (like writing briefs, engaging in legal argumentation, or reading legal texts). Rather they employ these procedures publicly. A key point here, then, is that instruction "occurs inside the procedure; it is not about the procedure, its rationale, its powers, or its limitations" (p. 361).

One of the basic assumptions of law school is that if students are not told overtly what to do and how to proceed, this will spur them on essentially to teach themselves. Minnis argues that this assumption does not, however, work equally well for everyone. Many students from minority or otherwise non-mainstream backgrounds fail in law school.

Minnis argues that this is so because these students have not, in their prior schooling and social experience, been exposed to and coached in the sorts of competitive academic behaviors and "other survival skills appropriate to the situation encountered in the law school classroom" (p. 362):

Contemporary legal education is designed for the good students, those who can understand what the professors mean but never explicitly say in the classes. Not surprisingly, given that mutual unspoken understanding between teachers and students requires common prior experiences, most good law students are traditional law students. They are students whose economic, social, and educational backgrounds are much like those of traditional law professors. These students, that is, are members of middle- and upper-class

society, the dominant culture, the culture that shaped the law. Accordingly, they are inclined to accept without question beliefs that are characteristic of that culture and that give them an advantage in law school. In short, their personal histories have taught them to confront the world aggressively; they esteem reasoning over other ways of knowing, individual accomplishment over collective accomplishment, and competition over cooperation.

(380)

It should be stressed, however, that the problem is not just that non-mainstream student have not had the same sorts of educational preparations as those who take more “naturally” to law school instruction. Law school is a set of related social practices that constitute a “Discourse,” which is, of course connected to the larger Discourse of law.

The social practices and positions of the Discourse of law school conflict, and conflict seriously, with the social practices and positions of the other Discourses to which many minorities and other non-mainstream students belong. They conflict much less—or not at all—with the social practices and positions of the other Discourses to which many mainstream students belong.

Let us put the matter somewhat differently: **The Discourse of law school creates kinds of people who (overtly or tacitly) define themselves as different from—often “better” than—other kinds of people.** For many minority and other non-mainstream students, the Discourse of law school makes them be both kinds of people. They get to define their kind (as law student) as different from—often “better” than—their own kind (as a member of one of their other Discourses). A paradox, indeed—unfortunately one they get to live and feel in their bodies and their minds.

Let us give a specific example of how these differences can work out in practice. The discussion in law school classrooms is intensely legal (Williams 1991). The professor is generally indifferent “to economic, social, or other contexts in which the events described in the judicial opinions might be viewed” (359). Minnis points out that several scholars (Gopen 1984; White 1984) see a close similarity between case analysis in the law classroom and the formalistic study of poetry. In the formal analysis of poetry, as well, large social, political, and cultural contexts are ignored in favor of an intense focus on language form, ambiguity, and possible meanings.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, and will see again in the next chapter, some people (in some of their social practices, connected often to their home and community-based Discourses) do not choose to isolate

language from larger realms of experience. More generally, some families and social groups highly value cooperation, not competition, and some of these will not engage authority figures, like parents or teachers, including law school teachers, in adversarial dialogue. (Minnis discusses the case of a Chicana law student in some detail, based on her own account, pp. 382 ff.) For some, being inducted into law school social practices means learning behaviors at odds with their other social practices that are constitutive of their other social identities. People like us don't do things like that; we're not that kind of person. And yet law school summons us to do just that, to be just that kind of person.

The conflict, then, is not just that I am uncomfortable engaging in a new practice—much as a new physical activity may involve using new muscles. Rather, the conflict is between who I am summoned to be in this new Discourse (law school) and who I am in other Discourses that overtly conflict with—and sometimes have historically contested with—this Discourse. Since Discourses (e.g., law school student and Hispanic-American of a certain sort) always exist and mean in juxtaposition to each other, performances in one often have meaning in regard to—and repercussions for—others. I can be asked in mind and body to “mean against” some of my other social identities and their concomitant values. It is not for nothing that the ancient Romans asked the ancient Christians to spit on the cross as a sign of their loyalty.

Minnis recommends that, if they wish to treat their non-mainstream students fairly, law schools ought to “make their assumptions, their values, the culture of the legal community—everything that comprises “thinking like a lawyer”—concrete and accessible” (385). While I certainly agree with this advice, I would also caution that making things concrete and accessible—rendering overt the “rules of the game”—is not an educational panacea and involves complex problems.

First, this cannot really be done in any very exhaustive manner. All that goes into thinking, acting, believing, valuing, dressing, interacting, reading, and writing like a lawyer cannot be put overtly in words. Whatever we could say, however long we took to say it, would only be the fleeting tip of an iceberg. Further, as overt knowledge it would not ground fluent behaviors any more than overt knowledge of dance steps can ground fluid dancing. In the absence of the full immersion that mainstream students are getting in the law school classroom, all that would happen with overt information would be that non-mainstream students would engage in rather stilted performances that “hypercorrected” what “real” lawyers look, talk, and act like (Gee 1992; Perkins 1992, 1995).

This is certainly not to say that overt information could not help non-mainstream students know where to focus in the rich stream of texts and interactions that compose law school. It is certainly not to recommend "hiding" aspects of language and interaction that lead to success and which we can describe and explicate. However, we certainly cannot come close to describing and explicating even a small part of the "game" in any realistic detail. The game "works," in part, precisely because this cannot be done. Furthermore, no amount of description and explication will remove or necessarily mitigate very real conflicts between Discourses.

The practices of a Discourse—like those of law school—contain in their public interactional structures the "mentalities" learners are meant to "internalize." Immersion in such practices—learning inside the procedures, rather than overly about them—ensures that the learner takes on perspectives, adopts a world view, accepts a set of core values, and masters an identity often without a great deal of critical and reflective awareness about these matters, nor, indeed, about the Discourse itself.

In stating these problems, I am not offering a counsel of despair. My point is, rather, that literacy and the New Literacy Studies are deeply political matters. We must take overt value stances and engage in overt contest between Discourses, juxtaposing Discourses and using one to change another. Ultimately, for all the very real challenges they face, bi-Discursal people (people who have or are mastering two contesting or conflicting Discourses) are the ultimate sources of change, just as bilinguals very often are in the history of language. The non-mainstream law student who manages to pull off recognizable and acceptable law school Discourse practices, but infuses them with aspects of her other Discourses, is a source of challenge and change. So, too, are more overt challenges by those who have gotten themselves—by hook or crook—inside the door. So, too, are challenges from other Discourses, even from people who have never gotten inside.

It is sometimes argued that a Discourse perspective is "deterministic," predestining people to success or failure in Discourses like law school based on conflicts or resonances of their other Discourses with the new Discourse (Delpit 1995). Nothing could be further from the truth. The history of Discourses is a history of struggle, contestation, and change. Far from always losing, "non-mainstream" people often win, and sometimes, for better or worse, they become a new "mainstream," a new center of social power.

A Discourse perspective simply argues that historic sociocultural struggles are enacted by and on people's bodies and minds, often with much pain and injustice. These struggles are always between "kinds" of

people, but these “kinds” are enacted by specific people with their specific and idiosyncratic bodies, minds, and feelings. This battle of “kinds” acted out by specific individuals (who are actually many “kinds” of people at once) causes some of the deepest perplexities in human life (McCall 1995). The moral of a Discourse perspective is just this: no one, but no one, should feel like a “loser” when they have lost these Discourse wars (e.g., the non-mainstream law students Minnis discusses), given the subtle, complex, and often arbitrary ways in which Discourses connected to power “stack the decks” in the favor of certain “kinds of people.”

Acquisition and learning

We can distinguish two broad sorts of Discourses in any society: The first sort is what I called “primary Discourses” above. The second sort I called “secondary Discourses.” Primary Discourses are those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings. Primary Discourses constitute our first social identity, and something of a base within which we acquire or resist later Discourses. They form our initial taken-for-granted understandings of who we are and who people “like us” are, as well as what sorts of things we (“people like us”) do, value, and believe when we are not “in public.” Lots can happen to them as we go through life, and by the time we are no longer children our primary Discourse has transmuted into our lifeworld Discourse, our culturally distinctive way of being an “everyday” person, not a specialist of some sort.

Secondary Discourses are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socializations within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization—for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices. They constitute the recognizability and meaningfulness of our “public” (more formal) acts. A particular woman, for instance, might be recognized as a businesswoman, political activist, feminist, church member, National Organization of Women official, PTA member, and volunteer Planned Parenthood counselor, and many more, by carrying out performances that are recognizable within and by these Discourses.

This distinction between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses is not meant to be airtight and unproblematic. In fact, I draw the distinction precisely because the boundary between the two sorts of Discourses is constantly negotiated and contested in society and history. Many social groups borrow aspects of valued secondary Discourses into the

socialization of their children in an attempt to advantage their children's acquisition of these secondary Discourses, whether they be school-based, community-based, or religion-based Discourses, for instance. For example, many middle-class homes use school-based language and practices with their small children at home long before they go to school, as we saw in Chapter 8 above, to advantage their children for school. Many African-Americans incorporate church-based language and practices into their early home-based interactions with their children, as, indeed, did my own family.

People also, later in life, strategically use aspects of their primary Discourses or community-based secondary Discourses in "pulling off" performances in some of their other secondary Discourses. For example, consider the ways in which Jesse Jackson combined a distinctive African-American church-based secondary Discourse with a mainstream political Discourse. Such a move is risky. If people had rejected Jackson as a national politician because they saw the African-American bits (e.g., his rhetorical devices) as "unacceptable" in mainstream political Discourse ("being/doing a national politician"), then he would have failed to get recognized as such. But the time and place was (eventually) right and lots of people—even political enemies—did recognize him as a national politician. Since his risk worked, he actually changed the political Discourse, allowing new types of performances to work. In turn, others followed him (to the point where even white Republican politicians use some of the same—admittedly attenuated—sorts of rhetorical devices in their speeches). This is one important way in which Discourses change—people mix them and their mixtures get recognized and accepted (but, of course, not always or even usually).

How do people come by the Discourses they are members of? Here it is necessary, before answering the question, to make an important distinction, a distinction that does not exist in non-technical parlance: a distinction between acquisition and learning (Krashen 1985a, b). This distinction is, like the one above between primary and secondary Discourses, not meant to be taken as airtight and unproblematic. What it really involves is a continuum whose two poles are "acquisition" and "learning," with mixed cases in between. (For a much more nuanced and detailed discussion about learning, see Gee 2003, 2004.)

We will distinguish acquisition and learning as follows:

Acquisition is a process of acquiring something (usually, subconsciously) by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching. It happens in

natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that acquirers know that they need to acquire the thing they are exposed to in order to function and they in fact want to so function. This is how people come to control their first language.

Learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) or through certain life experiences that trigger conscious reflection. This teaching or reflection involves explanation and analysis, that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter.

(Pinker 1989, 1994)

Much of what we come by in life, after our initial enculturation, involves a mixture of acquisition and learning. However, the balance between the two can be quite different in different cases and different at different stages in the developmental process. For instance, many of us initially learned to drive a car by instruction, but thereafter acquired, rather than learned, most of what we know.

Some cultures highly value acquisition and so tend simply to expose children to adults modeling some activity and eventually the child picks it up, picks it up as a gestalt, rather than as a series of analytic bits (Heath 1983; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Street 1984). Other cultural groups highly value teaching and thus break down what is to be mastered into sequential steps and analytic parts and engage in explicit explanation.

There is an up side and a down side to both acquisition and learning that can be expressed as follows: We are better at performing what we acquire, but we consciously know more about what we have learned. For most of us, playing a musical instrument, or dancing, or using a second language, are skills we attained by some mixture of acquisition and learning. But it is a safe bet that, over the same amount of time, people are better at (performing) these activities if acquisition predominated during that time.

What is undoubtedly true of first language development (Pinker 1994) and has been argued, controversially, to be true in the case of second language development (Krashen 1985a, b) is, I would argue, true of Discourses: Discourses are mastered through acquisition, not learning. That is, Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation ("apprenticeship") into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse (Newman *et al.* 1989; Rogoff 1990, 2003; Tharp and

Gallimore 1988). This is how we all acquired our native language and our primary Discourses. It is how we acquire all later, more public-oriented Discourses. If you have no access to the social practice, you don't get in the Discourse, you don't have it.

As a Discourse is being mastered by acquisition, then, of course, learning can be used to facilitate "meta-knowledge." You cannot overtly teach anyone a Discourse, in a classroom or anywhere else. This is not to say that acquisition can't go on in a classroom, but only that if it does, this isn't because of overt "teaching," but because of a process of "apprenticeship" and social practice.

Acquisition must (at least, partially) precede learning; apprenticeship must precede overt teaching. Classrooms that do not properly balance acquisition and learning, and realize which is which, simply privilege those students who have already begun the acquisition process outside the school. Too little acquisition leads to too little mastery-in-practice; too little learning leads to too little analytic and reflective awareness and limits the capacity for certain sorts of critical reading and reflection (though, of course, only certain sorts of learning lead beyond mere conscious awareness and reflectiveness to an actual "critical" capacity).

It is very important to realize that the English language often leads us to confuse terms for products/props/content and terms for Discourses. Thus, take an academic discipline like linguistics. You can overtly teach someone (the content knowledge of the discipline of) linguistics, which is a body of facts and theories; however, while knowledge of some significant part of these facts and theories is necessary to actually being a linguist, you cannot overtly teach anyone to do "being a linguist" (remember "doing being a real Indian" above), which is a Discourse.

A person could know a great deal about linguistics and still not be (accepted as) a linguist. "Autodidacts" are precisely people who, while often extremely knowledgeable, trained themselves and thus were trained outside of a process of group practice and socialization. They are almost never accepted as "insiders," "members of the club (profession, group)." Our Western focus on individualism makes us constantly forget the importance of having been "properly socialized."

Let us now turn to the *privo* in the definition of learning above about "certain life experiences that trigger conscious reflection," causing the same effects as overt teaching. In our definition of learning we are concerned with what usually or prototypically counts as "teaching" in our culture. This involves breaking down what is to be taught into its analytic bits and getting learners to learn it in such a way that they can "talk about," "describe," "explain" it. That is, the learner is meant to have

"meta-knowledge" about what is learned and to be able to engage in "meta-talk" about it. We often teach even things like driving this way. But not all cultures engage in this sort of teaching, and not all of them use the concept "teaching" in this way, nor, indeed, do all instances of what is sometimes called "teaching" in our own culture fit this characterization (Heath 1983; Scribner and Cole 1981; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Street 1984).

In many cultures where there is no such overt analytical teaching, some people still gain a good deal of "meta-knowledge" about what they know and do. This appears to come about by that fact they have had certain experiences which have caused them to think about a particular Discourse in a reflective and critical way (Goody 1977, 1986: 1-44). When we have really mastered anything (e.g., a Discourse), we have little or no conscious awareness of it. (Indeed, like dancing, Discourses wouldn't work if people were consciously aware of what they were doing while doing it.) However, when we come across a situation where we are unable to accommodate or adapt, we become consciously aware of what we are trying to do or are being called upon to do (Vygotsky 1987: 167-241). While such an experience can happen to anyone, they are common among people who are somewhat "marginal" to a Discourse or culture, and, thus, such people often have insights into the workings of these Discourses or cultures that more "mainstream" members do not. This is, in fact, the advantage to being "socially maladapted" (as long as the maladaptation is not too dysfunctional and, to be sure, this is not to say that there are not also disadvantages). And, of course, people in our culture can have such experiences apart from classrooms (and often have them in classrooms when it is the classroom, school, or teacher that is causing the maladaptation).

Ruth Finnegan (1967, 1988), in studies of the Limba, a nonliterate group in Sierra Leone, points out that the Limba have a great deal of meta-linguistic and reflective sophistication in their talk about language, sophistication of the sort that we normally think is the product of writing and formal schooling, both of which the Limba do not have. Finnegan attributes this sophistication to the Limba's multiple contacts with speakers of other languages and with those languages themselves. And here we have a clue, then. Good classroom instruction (in composition, study skills, writing, critical thinking, content-based literacy, or whatever) can and should lead to meta-knowledge, to seeing how the Discourses you have already got (not just the languages) relate to those you are attempting to acquire, and how the ones you are trying to acquire relate to self and society. But to do this, the classroom must juxtapose different

Discourses for comparison and contrast. Diversity, then, is not an “add on,” but a cognitive necessity if we wish to develop meta-awareness and overt reflective insight on the part of learners.

Literacy and Discourses

All humans, barring serious disorder, become members of one Discourse free, to speak—their primary Discourse. It is important to realize that even among speakers of English there are socioculturally different primary Discourses, and that these Discourses use language differently. For example, many lower socioeconomic African-American children use English within their primary Discourse to make sense of their experience differently than do middle class children (see Leona’s stories in the last chapter and Heath 1982, 1983; Kochman 1972, 1981; Rickford and Rickford 2000, Smitherman 1977). And this is not due merely to the fact that they have a different dialect of English. So-called “African-American Vernacular English” is, on structural grounds, only trivially different from standard English by the norms of linguists accustomed to dialect differences around the world (see Chapter 1 above and Baugh 1983, 1999, 2000; Labov 1972a). Rather, these children use language, behavior, values, and beliefs to give a different shape to their experience.

A person’s primary Discourse serves as a “framework” or “base” for their acquisition and learning of other Discourses later in life. It also shapes, in part, the form this acquisition and learning will take and the final result. Furthermore, Discourses acquired later in life can influence a person’s primary Discourse, having various effects on it, (re-)shaping it in various ways. Adults can then pass on these reshaped primary Discourses to their children. These mutual influences among Discourses underlie the processes of historical change of Discourses.

Quite obviously in a society like the United States, where there is so much mobility, diffuse class and (sub-)cultural borders, class ambiguity, and so many attempts to deny, change, or otherwise hide one’s initial socialization if it was not “mainstream” enough, there are many complexities around the notion of “primary Discourse” and many problems in tracing its fate through individual lives. Indeed, these problems are a difficulty not just for scholars studying these matters: the large amount of *anomie*, alienation, and worry about “self” and “identity” in the United States, and related societies, has its roots in these very problems. I want to embed the notion of “literacy” within the framework of Discourses precisely because I believe that issues like these, far from invalidating

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