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Historical Discourse

The Language of Time, Cause and Evaluation

Caroline Coffin

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For the Coffin family – past and present – who have motivated and influenced me in many positive ways and to whom I am for ever indebted.

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Preface

This book is about the language or discourse of history and is based on original research that I have conducted over the last ten years. The main aim of the book is to show readers how linguistic analysis can illuminate the way students of history use language to write and, in so doing, think about and conceptualize the past. It focuses on historical discourse that occurs in secondary school, examining in detail the kinds of texts[1] that students are required to read and write as they move from the earlier to later years. Much of the research underpinning the discussion was initially carried out as part of a large-scale literacy research project known as 'Write it Right' (WIR) and was conducted in the 1990s under the auspices of the Disadvantaged Schools Programme in New South Wales, Australia (see Coffin, 1996). The overarching aim of the project, on which I worked as a researcher and literacy/EAL[2] consultant, was to use the tools of functional linguistics to reveal the reading and writing demands of a range of school subjects and related workplace sites. Christie and Martin (1997) and Veel (forthcoming, 2006) provide a summary of some of the most significant findings.

The WIR project provided me with an opportunity to carry out a detailed ethnographic and linguistic investigation of what is involved in learning the discourse of history. Through interviews and a study of comments on student work, for example, I was able to explore what teachers and examiners expect and value in student reading and writing. Most significantly, my participation in classroom lessons across 17 schools over a period of two years (which included team teaching in history literacy interventions) gave me insight into history from the student perspective and gave me a stronger sense of why historical discourse may be challenging for some students, particularly those with low literacy levels. I am therefore very grateful to the teachers and students who participated in that project. Equally, I am indebted to my fellow WIR researchers who worked cooperatively and productively under Jim Martin's leadership. Colleagues included Susan Feez, Sally Humphrey, Rick Iedema, Joan Rothery, Maree Stenglin, Robert Veel and Peter White. In particular, I am grateful to Jim Martin for all his stimulating input, support and encouragement. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Michael Halliday, the 'powerhouse' behind not just the WIR project but all my linguistic research.

Since my time on the WIR project in Australia, I have had the good fortune to work with, and talk to, history teachers in the UK, gaining insight into the way history is taught and learned in that particular context at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In particular, my thanks go to Timothy Brazier (Head of History, Bromley High School, Kent), Kevin Jones (Head of Humanities Faculty, Langley Park School for Girls, Beckenham, Kent), Martin Spafford (Forest Gate Community School, Waltham Forest, London) and Dave Martin (History Advisor and textbook author, Dorchester and research fellow at the Open University).

As a result of my research and collaboration in schools across Australia and the UK, the insights presented in this book are based on a large corpus of over 1000 authentic history texts representing the types of reading and writing that secondary school history students undertake. Readers will find in this book a wide range of examples of history discourse covering a multitude of historical topics. Texts include those written by textbook authors, schoolteachers, literacy consultants and students, some of which are effective examples of history writing and some of which are less so. I should emphasize, however, that the quantitative findings referred to at various points in the book and set out in the Appendix are based on a smaller, more manageable corpus of 38 samples of student writing. The texts in this 'mini-corpus' were carefully selected to represent the most commonly recurring types of text within the much larger corpus. In addition, they were all examples of successful student writing (as measured by assessment comments and marks, alongside discussions with history teachers) since my purpose in the quantitative studies was to:

a) capture key linguistic resources for making historical meaning
   and
b) elucidate the features that address the requirements of secondary history curricula
   in order to
c) form a basis for literacy interventions.

Although my direct involvement in history teaching and learning has been within the Australian and UK contexts, I am interested in developments more broadly and I have benefited from research conducted in many different contexts, including America and Europe. For this reason, where useful, I make reference to curriculum statements from the American as well as Australian and UK contexts. My aim here is to inform readers of any significant differences or developments in the way history is taught and learned around the world and, of most significance to this book, the implications of these for the role of language and literacy in learning. For those readers unfamiliar with one or more of the different school systems, Figure 1 may provide a helpful overview.

Finally, I would like to thank my various critical readers who helped to make enormous improvements to the book. These include Francis Christie

Table 1 The structure of secondary/high schools in America, Australia and England

	America	Australia	England
Secondary school entry and end points and approximate ages (note, however, that there is often variation depending on the existence of middle schools)	grades 7–12 (ages 12–18) or grades 9–12 (where middle schools cover grades 6–9)	years 7–12 (ages 12–18)	years 7–13 (ages 11–18)
Learning stages and average corresponding student age	N/A	stage 3/4 (ages 11–12) stage 5 (ages 13–15) stage 6 (ages 16–18)	key stage 3 (ages 11–14) key stage 4 (ages 14–16) key stage 5 (ages 16–18)
Terms for learning objectives or goals	standards	outcomes	attainment targets
Significant public exams and approximate age	Varies from state to state	School Certificate (age 16) Higher School Certificate (HSC) (age 18)	GCSE (age 16) AS level (age 17) A2 level (age 18)

(Emeritus Professor of Language and Literacy Education, University of Melbourne, and Honorary Professor of Education, University of Sydney, Australia), Beverly Derewianka (Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Australia), Dr Clare Painter (Senior Lecturer, School of English and Linguistics, University of New South Wales, Australia) and my colleagues at the Open University, UK, particularly Kieran O'Halloran (Lecturer in the Centre for Language and Communication) and Dave Martin (Research Fellow in the Educational Dialogue Research Unit).

I am equally grateful to Carol Johns-MacKenzie and Pam Burns at the Open University for all their help and expertise in obtaining copyright permissions and helping to prepare the manuscript.

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Notes

1 In this book the word *text* is used to refer to any stretch of language, spoken or written. For that reason, each piece of language that I use for illustrative purposes (complete or incomplete) is labelled Text 1.1, 1.2 etc. Those texts which were written by students or teachers and which were collected as part of my research on the WIR project and subsequent personal research are not explicitly referenced, unless they are published exam essays. All examples taken from textbooks are fully referenced.

2 English as an Additional Language is the term used to describe teachers and consultants working with students for whom English is not their first language. In some contexts the terms TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or ESL (English as a Second Language) are used.

1 Introduction: why history?

Why investigate historical discourse?

In this book, I show how the type of historical discourse that circulates within essays and school textbooks requires students to think about and conceptualize the past in particular ways. I demonstrate that students make different linguistic choices in the way they structure their writing and that successful students do this with increasing sophistication as they move from the earlier to later years of secondary schooling.

You might wonder why investigating historical discourse is of interest and who it might be of interest to. Based on my experience, I would argue that in the first place it is educationally valuable. Learning to read and write history successfully is not a straightforward process for all students. In fact, it is the linguistically demanding nature of history which may account for the fact that less able students are often reluctant to continue their studies beyond the obligatory years (in the UK this is Year 9). It seems to me that a comprehensive description of the discourse of history and how different demands are made of students across the secondary years makes an important contribution to understanding potential difficulties and provides a firm foundation for making improvements to educational practice.

A further reason why an investigation of the discourse of history is of interest lies in its public significance. We only have to consider the 'History Wars' and debates that have recurred with such frequency in the press and on the floors of government and congress over the last decade to realize that issues of history have 'spilled beyond school-house walls and become part of the national agenda' (Stearns *et al.*, 2000, p. 1). This increase in public interest in history and concern over what school history should include has, I think, in part been sparked by issues of identity, both individual and collective. Such issues appear to be exercising the Western world in the early part of the twenty-first century – for many people, it is our history that makes us who we are. The British historian Keith Jenkins puts it this way:

> people(s) in the present need antecedents to locate themselves now and legitimate their ongoing and future ways of living ... all classes/groups write their collective autobiographies. History is the way people(s) create, in part, their

identities. It is far more than a slot in the school/academic curriculum. (Jenkins 1991: 18–19)

Perhaps another reason why history has captured people's interest and imagination lies in the increasingly colourful and dramatic media presentations of the past. These range from epic historical Hollywood films making imaginative use of computer graphics in order to depict past times vividly (e.g. *Gladiator, Troy, Alexander the Great*) to TV docu-dramas on important historical figures (e.g. *Henry the VIII, Elizabeth I*) presented by charismatic historians. Then there are the nation-gripping TV debates and polls on great figures from the past (e.g. *Great Britons, Great Americans, Great Germans*). In contrast, there is also the emphasis on the ordinary individual in historical narratives such as Antony Beevor's retelling of the Battle of Stalingrad which, rather than simply being viewed as military history, has been hailed as a 'compelling tale of human retribution' (Max Hastings, *Evening Standard*).

Finally, there is the trend for history to be seen no longer as the preserve of the professional. Increasingly, we are all being encouraged to be historians and to investigate our personal and national heritage. The growth of interest in family history (encouraged in the UK by programmes such as *Time Team*) is interesting because it ties in with issues of identity mentioned earlier.

If history is seen as a significant social phenomenon, surely its discourse merits some serious reflection and discussion in order to better understand it. The book is therefore of interest to those who view linguistic tools as a means of furthering our understanding of the social and cultural world we inhabit.

Why study history?

Clearly, beyond the walls of academia and school, history has quite different uses and may be harnessed for a range of purposes (including political, social and entertainment). But, even when viewed as an area of study, its meanings and purposes may vary. Below are three quotes which illustrate some of these differences. Each addresses the issue 'why study history?' In turn we have an academic, teacher and student perspective.

Arthur Marwick, academic
The simplest answer to the questions 'Why do history?' or 'What is the use of history?' is: 'Try to imagine what it would be like living in a society in which there was absolutely no knowledge of the past.' The mind boggles. It is only through a sense of history that communities establish their identity, orientate themselves and understand their relationship to the past and to other communities and societies. Without history, we, and our communities, would be utterly adrift on an endless and featureless sea of time. (Marwick, 2001, p. 32)

Timothy Brazier, history teacher
History makes them [students] well-informed citizens, well-rounded adults, it gives them a broader perspective on the country in which they live and how the country they know has developed . . . It explains the problems of the modern world, how these problems have been caused and possibly gets them to the solutions.

. . . immigration, for example, it's really important they have a take on these issues, that they can understand them rather than be in blind ignorance . . . and have the ability to enter into a debate even in an informal way. (Interview, March, 2005)

Jessica, secondary school student (aged 13)
I think people learn about history because they get insight into their country's past and how much people have done for them and why society is like it is today . . . It's very useful for general knowledge. I mean, if you're on 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?' and a million-pound question was 'Who ruled – dot, dot, dot', then it'd be very useful.

. . . It's good for seeing different points of view because for every bit of history there are two sides. I mean there's never a one-sided argument in history. Like saying Sadaam Hussein is evil. Obviously he is, but I suppose there could be another side to that story. He could have had a troubled childhood or was brought up badly. It helps you get into other people's shoes, see why they did things like they did. (Interview, May, 2005)

The previous quotes give some insight into the purpose of history as perceived by an academic, teacher and student. This book will expand such insights by using discourse analysis to explore further what history means – both as an area of knowledge and as a means of developing particular ways of thinking about and interpreting the past. In the remainder of the chapter, I introduce some of the aspects of historical discourse which linguistic analysis can illuminate and which I will go on to explore in the following chapters. I hope to show that the discourse of history is a complex but fascinating domain of language use and that understanding how it works is interesting in its own right as well as being of educational use.

How do different views of history affect ways of writing about the past?

Predictably, history, like any discipline (along with school history, like any area of teaching and learning) is not unified, fixed or stable in the way it builds and presents knowledge. It follows that it is not always easy to pin down what we mean by historical discourse. The following texts, for example, are all pieces produced by professional or student historians concerning the First World War. Yet they each have a distinct style and construe the past in quite different ways. This is because each text is underpinned by its own particular view of what history is and/or how it should be taught. As you read through the texts you might find it interesting to speculate on what these may be. For example, is history about producing a gripping narrative or providing a detached analysis?

Text 1.1

August 1914

SO GORGEOUS WAS THE SPECTACLE on the May morning of 1910 when nine kings rode in the funeral of Edward VII[1] of England that the crowd, waiting in hushed and black-clad awe could not keep back gasps of admiration. In scarlet and blue and green and purple, three by three the sovereigns rode through the palace gates, with plumed helmets, gold braid, crimson sashes and jewelled orders flashing in the sun. After them came five heirs apparent, forty more imperial or royal highnesses, seven queens – four dowager and three regnant – and a scattering of special ambassadors from uncrowned countries. Together they represented seventy nations in the greatest assemblage of royalty and rank ever gathered in one place and, of its kind, the last. The muffled tongues of Big Ben tolled nine by the clock as the cortège left the palace, but on history's clock it was sunset and the sun of the old world was setting in a dying blaze of splendour never to be seen again. (Tuchman, 1962/1991, p. 13)

Text 1.2[2]

Dear Mother and Isobel,

Since you last heard from me we've come all the way to Verdun. We crossed the channel on a big ship. We didn't have much space at all, because it was so crowded! When we arrived in France we disembarked and started to march East. Now we have reached the trenches and not much seems to be happening apart from a steady but light sniping crossfire between the lines and a couple of gas attacks. the gas attacks were awful. The first we heard was the sound of a stukka divebomber approaching and then the sirens went off. We all fumbled for our masks and everyone was put on stand by to defend against an imminent German assault, but it never came.

Today we heard about an offensive that i'll be taking part in. I can't tell you where or when it will be in case this letter is intercepted. It will be the first time that I go 'over the top', i'm looking forward to serving King and country but i'm quite nervous because old Tom who's the only one in our company who's been over the top before says that it's hell on earth. Since I arrived in the trenches we havn't done a lot. It's very muddy and wet the foods awful, their are rumors that they've caught and cooked some of the many rats which scamper around the trenches as I write.

I trust you're all fine back in England. Please give my love to everyone in Minster. Please write back as soon as possible Love from William

Text 1.3

Britain and the outbreak of war in 1914

Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, built on the agreements made with Japan and France by the Conservatives. In 1905 the German Emperor tried to undermine the Anglo-French Entente by declaring an interest in the future of Morocco. In the ensuing conference on Morocco at Algeciras in 1906, Britain supported France. Germany's clumsy diplomacy strengthened the Anglo-French Entente. In 1907 an agreement was made with Russia to settle differences over Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. This created the Triple Entente, which aligned Britain with France and Russia against the Triple Alliance, but it did not commit Britain to go to war as an ally of France and Russia.

... In 1914 Britain was still not firmly committed to an alliance with France and Russia. As the crisis sparked off by the assassinations at Sarajevo developed, drawing in Russia and France, it still seemed possible that Britain would remain neutral. The German invasion of Belgium tipped the balance. (Scaife, 2004, p. 56)

Text 1.4 Explain why the Allies were able to force the Germans to accept an armistice in November 1918

Probably the greatest factor for German defeat was the collapse of the Homefront. The German U-Boat campaign had lost the favour of neutral countries for Germany, the blockade by the British Navy on food imports (Germany imported 1/3 food and raw materials pre-war) and the loss of Britain as a trade market for Germany (had been greatest market pre-war) meant massive German food shortages. By 1918, 18000 people had died due to starvation, and energy intakes had halved. This helped to break the morale of the people as well as the basic fact of material shortages and poverty. Political division between the conservative forces and anti-war parties (KPD and SPD) and naval mutinies also help to create division and weaken Germany.

(Board of Studies, 1997, p. 22)

Text 1.5 Pandora's Box: propoganda and war hysteria in the United States during World War 1

The United States in 1917 was a heterogeneous, ethnically fragmented society.[9] The demographic shockwaves of the New Immigration that began in the 1890s combined with accelerated industrialization, an increasingly organized capitalist system, and rapid urbanization to foster social dislocation and unrest. The multiple frustrations engendered in this process led to violence within a society that was involved in a 'search for order.'[10] At the root of this violence was the struggle of old-stock Americans against a massive flood of immigrants, which signaled a profound social and cultural change.[11] ... The Progressive crusade thus took on an almost religious quality, although it had lost most of its momentum by the eve of World War I.

[9] See Hans Speier, 'Klassenstruktur und totaler Krieg,' in Uwe Nerlich, ed., *Krieg und Frieden im industriellen Zeitalter*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh, 1966), 1:247.

[10] Stressed by Robert H. Wiebe in his seminal study, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York, 1967).

[11] For a good survey of the history of social violence in the period before World War I, see Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to the Present* (Boston, 1978), 1–101.

(Nagler, 2000, p. 485)

From the sample texts you will have seen that some history writing is akin to story-telling and some more a matter of analysis and logical argument. That is, the first three extracts are clearly narrative in style whereby the writer records a succession of events as they unfolded in time. Moreover, in Text 1.1 (and in 1.2 to some extent), these events are described in a style that resembles fictional writing – there is colour, suspense and atmosphere, and a sense that the writer wants to involve the reader in the 'story'. In Text 1.1, an extract from the historian Barbara Tuchman's study of the plunge into the First World War, the description of the funeral of Edward VII is especially effective in the way it vividly captures the spectacle and grandeur of the

ceremony. It also strikes a dramatic note in its use of literary metaphor – *history's clock, the sun of the old world . . . setting in a dying blaze* . . . Perhaps not surprisingly *August 1914* has been described as 'a masterpiece of the historian's art'.

You might have recognized that Text 1.2, unlike Text 1.1, is not the product of a professional historian but written by a school student (aged 14). This student adopts the persona of a soldier in order to give an inside view of life in the trenches. Like the previous text it offers a recount of events and displays features associated with story telling. For example, it gives us insight into the (fictional) soldier's *feelings* about the war (e.g. *i'm quite nervous*). An emphasis on 'feeling' and imagination is particularly encouraged in approaches to history teaching that value 'empathetic understanding'.[3] One of the aims of setting tasks in empathetic understanding such as that represented in Text 1.2 is to combine the official history that students learn with a consideration of the way individual social subjects may have viewed events and what they may have felt about them. However, students may sometimes interpret empathetic tasks as an opportunity to use their imagination to step into the shoes of figures from the past, rather than a chance to display an *informed* use of imagination firmly rooted in a solid understanding of the subject matter. The result can be discourse more appropriate to the subject area of English than of history.

Another reason why examples of empathetic understanding such as Text 1.2 may not be viewed as historical discourse lies in the fact that they simulate what in history are referred to as 'primary sources'. Primary sources refer to the various types of documentary and other forms of evidence generated at (or close to) the time of a particular historical event: for example, personal letters (as simulated in Text 1.2), news reports, posters, maps, legal documents and cartoons. Primary sources are therefore quite different to the 'secondary sources', the records and interpretations produced by historians with some distance from events.[4] In other words, while historians need to read, analyse and integrate primary sources into their writing, the purposes and linguistic styles used in such sources are quite distinct from those in secondary sources. In this book, therefore, our main focus is on historical discourse produced by historians (including textbook authors) and student historians with the express purpose of recording, explaining or interpreting past events.

In comparison with the first two extracts, Text 1.3 (taken from a student revision guide) is less colourful and emotive but, in common with them, focuses on retelling events. The writers of Texts 1.4 (written by a student) and 1.5 (written by a professional historian), in contrast, focus less on people and events and more on explanation and interpretation. Their approach follows a more 'scientific' model in which propositions about abstract historical processes (e.g. *probably the greatest factor for German defeat* . . .) are supported through evidence. As a result, their less colourful style could be described as academic and 'objective'. The term 'objective' is, however, contentious, and one we will return to and explore further in the next section.

Finally, historical writing can be highly abstract and self-reflexive. In the following extract, Text 1.6, the historian Joyce introduces his study of labouring peoples' perception of the social order in nineteenth-century industrial England. His style is quite distinct from the ones we have already discussed. This is because it is influenced by postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches to history in which terms drawn from theories of discourse (after Foucault[5]) abound. In this approach to history, one of the central tenets is the impossibility of objective knowledge and the acceptance of the partial and fragmentary, and therefore subjective, nature of human experience and accounts of it.

Text 1.6

I Introduction: beyond class?

. . . while there is no denying that class was a child of the nineteenth century, when it comes to how the social order was represented and understood, there were other children too who were every bit as lusty as class – indeed, in many respects stronger and more fully part of their time. Received wisdom has in fact become a dead weight, the fixation with class denying us sight of these other visions of the social order. This fixation has recently come under direct fire, significantly from the left rather than from the right: both empirically and analytically, the concept of class has been attacked as inappropriate and inadequate. This scepticism is to be applauded. It informs the present work, though the fire here is less direct. Class will not go away. It has its place, and an important one, though it does from time to time need to be put in it. A good part of this disciplining of the class concept involves attention to the actual terms in which contemporaries talked about the social order, and to the means through which they communicated their perceptions. In short, it involves attention to language, to the means and content of human communication. This, therefore, is as much a book about language as about class. At least in part it is a product of its post-structuralist times. It is necessary, however, to begin with the concept of class. And here, of course, it all depends upon how one defines class. (Joyce, 1991, pp. 1–2)

The six examples of historical discourse that you have just encountered represent the, at times, vigorously debated and polarized positions taken up by historians and history educators. These different positions are concerned with questions such as whether history should offer stories about – or present analysis of – past events, and the concomitant question of whether history belongs more to the humanities or to the social sciences. Then there is the question of the extent to which studying history is a matter of stepping into the shoes of figures from the past and developing an appreciation of, and a feeling for, their attitudes and values. Finally, there is the issue of whether history can claim objectivity based on its methods of investigation. Or are historians inevitably subjective in their interpretations in that they are trapped in the ideologies (discourses) of their times and constrained by the evidence available to them?

Such issues and questions are intriguing and are certainly not easily resolved, as evidenced by the set of 'classics' published over the last 50 years

that aim to unravel the purposes and practices of history. These include Carr's (1961) *What is History?*, Elton's (1967) *The Practice of History*, Skinner's investigations of the nature of historical writing (1988, 1996), Tosh's (1991) *The Pursuit of History* and more recently Marwick's (2001) revised *The New Nature of History* and Jenkins's (1995) *On 'What is History?'* This book aims to contribute to the exploration and debates concerning the meaning and purposes of history. The perspective, however, is a linguistic one and the focus is on how citizens are inducted into ways of thinking like a historian within the institutional context of secondary schooling. The following questions are ones that, in that context, seem particularly pertinent.

Can historical writing be described as objective?

The debate over objectivity/subjectivity is a particularly interesting and relevant issue for this book in that linguistic analysis can, I think, make a useful contribution to our understanding of the degree to which history represents the past in objective or subjective terms. Currently, it is an intensely contested area (see, for example, Marwick, 2001, pp. 38–44), with the two citations below representing extreme positions on the issue. The first is a quotation from the postmodernist historian Keith Jenkins, who takes the position that not only should historians recognize the subjective nature of the *content* of the past and accept multi-levelled perspectives, but they should also problematize the status of its *form*. The second quotation represents the classical, empiricist approach to historical study initiated by nineteenth-century historians such as Ranke and Acton where the aim is 'to show how things really happened'.

History as subjective

> The sifting out of that which is historically significant depends on us, so that what 'the past' means to us is always our task to 'figure out'; what we want our inheritance/history 'to be' is always waiting to be 'read' and written in the future like any other text: the past as history lies before us, not behind us. (Jenkins, 2003, p. 30)

History as objective

> Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are 'found', not 'made' . . . The objective historian's role is that of a neutral, or disinterested judge . . . The historian's conclusions are expected to display the standard judicial qualities of balance and even-handedness. (Novick, 1988, p. 2)

In between the two stances represented above lies the intermediate view that seems to be most influential in school history: that history is no longer a

neutral discipline founded on an immutable body of facts. Rather the past is contested ground in which numerous interpretations compete. In particular, students are encouraged to critically analyse a range of sources presenting different perspectives on an issue in order to understand the way in which the same event may be variously (subjectively) interpreted and represented. Nevertheless, there remains a general belief that substantiated, empirically detailed, well-researched and balanced accounts can be characterized as (relatively) objective and of greater value than unsupported and skewed representations.

This brings us to a further important point: that the texts that historians and students have to critically analyse – that is, read (as opposed to write) in order to construct their versions of the past – include primary sources that are not in themselves examples of historical discourse as defined earlier, that is, 'discourse produced by historians (including textbook authors) or student historians which has the express purpose of recording, explaining and interpreting past events'. Primary sources (such as news reports, personal letters, political cartoons) are produced for a vast array of purposes by a wide range of authors. Nevertheless, they are extremely important in the production of history. They need to be read, critically evaluated and absorbed into texts such as those set out at the beginning of the chapter. For this reason, I will show the relevance of linguistic tools for helping students to unpick discourse that is not strictly 'historical discourse' (unless or until, that is, it is absorbed into the writing of historians/student historians).

Indeed, it is in this area of critical analysis of primary sources that I believe linguistics has an important role to play – by providing us with tools to tease out the way in which evaluative positions permeate the vast range of sources on which historical accounts are built.

Equally important, such analytical tools are useful in unpicking evaluative positions in secondary sources (even the most seemingly impartial and objective accounts) as well as the history texts that students themselves produce. It is an area that I will explore in more detail in Chapter 7, but by way of preview let us return to the texts set out earlier and pick out some examples of words and phrases that colour the accounts and which may, however, have passed unnoticed.

From Text 1.1
. . . on history's clock it was **sunset** . . .

From Text 1.3
Germany's **clumsy** diplomacy strengthened the Anglo-French Entente.

From Text 1.4
Probably the **greatest** factor for German defeat was the collapse of the Homefront.

Narrative or argument?

Linguistic analysis can also play an important role in relation to the other major issue which I have identified as important to history and history education. This is the question of whether writing about the past is best achieved through 'telling a story' or presenting a logical argument. In fact, this book will show that it is helpful to conceive of history writing as comprising elements of both narrative and argument. More importantly, I will propose that the two-way distinction (narrative/argument) should be abandoned in favour of a model that views historical discourse (within secondary schooling) as comprising a repertoire of different types of text or 'genres', each of which enables different ways of thinking and writing about the past.

What makes history a demanding subject?

It is generally agreed that, as a school subject, history is challenging in that it requires students to be able to read critically and write persuasively at a relatively advanced level (Schleppegrell, 2004). I have already suggested that one potential area of difficulty may be *perspective* (the objectivity/subjectivity debate). I have also made the point that learning the discourse of history requires developing *a range of ways of writing about the past.*

There are two further aspects of history that I will focus on in this book because I regard them as being of particular significance – both in terms of understanding history as a domain of knowledge and in terms of illuminating the kinds of difficulties that students might face when studying history. These are *time* and *cause-and-effect*, both of which have, in fact, been singled out in educational research as being central to learning history but also likely to create problems. With regard to time, research shows that even adolescents can find it difficult to handle chronological order and represent the duration of historical periods (Carretero *et al.*, 1991, 35; Stow and Haydn, 2000; Wood 1995). And yet:

> the practice of history is inextricably linked to ideas of time, to calendrical systems, and above all to the metaphors through which we think about periods. (Jordanova, 2000, p. 115).

Certainly, any historical writing is likely to draw on a wide range of linguistic expressions for construing time. In the extracts below, taken from Antony Beevor's (multiple) narrative account of the Battle of Stalingrad (Beevor, 1999), you can see a variety of expressions that are used to carve up the past and create chronological order and duration.

> The classic account of the epic turning point in the Second World War (back cover of book)
>
> Two and half years after the purge began, the Red Army presented a disastrous spectacle in the Winter War against Finland. (p. 23)
>
> During the second week of December, a savagely exultant Stalin became convinced that the Germans were on the point of disintegration. (p. 42) (Beevor, 1999)

Like time, cause-and-effect is also pivotal to historical meaning-making. It is not just *what* happened that interests historians. More fascinating are the questions, why did it happen, and why did it have the influence it did? Cause-and-effect can, however, pose problems for some students. For example, they may find it difficult to move from chains of cause-and-effect to multiple and simultaneously occurring factors and consequences. Educational research has also shown that, while historians tend to favour impersonal, abstract structures as providing suitable explanations for historical events and states of affairs, students often remain focused on human 'wants and desires' (Halldén, 1997, p. 205).

In sum, there are several aspects of historical discourse that require further exploration. As stated earlier, the main aim of this book is to show how discourse analysis can extend our understanding of such areas and thus provide a firm basis for making educational interventions.

What is meant by discourse analysis?

Both 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' have come to have different meanings depending on the theoretical framework they are located within. In this book, discourse is used to refer to language and meaning above the level of the clause and is concerned with the interrelationship between language, meaning and the social and cultural context. However, in concepts of discourse derived from post-structuralism and associated with Foucault (see footnote 5), discourse refers not only to particular uses of language in context but also to the world views and ideologies that are implicit or explicit in such uses and which define and delimit what it is possible to say and not say. While not explicitly drawing on Foucauldian notions of discourse, I would argue that the close, detailed analysis of the linguistic patterns of history texts discussed in this book necessarily raise awareness of the system of beliefs and practices which constitute school history.

Within another approach to discourse analysis referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2001), discourse has a slightly different meaning again. In fact, in that tradition, it has two meanings. One meaning (Discourse 1) refers to the 'coherent understanding the reader makes from the text. It can include how the values of the reader, the reading context and so on affect the reading of the text in the production of coherence' (O'Halloran, 2003, p. 12). The other refers to the Foucauldian sense of Discourse (Discourse 2). Importantly, Discourse 2 constrains Discourse 1. While reader interpretation is not the primary analytical focus of the findings presented in this book, it is an area of increasing importance in functional linguistic approaches to discourse analysis, particularly in relation to the area of evaluative meaning (e.g. Coffin and O'Halloran 2005, 2006; Macken-Horarik, 2003; Martin, 1996, 2004; Martin and Rose, 2003). Issues of reader positioning and

interpretation are therefore discussed in Chapter 7, where I explore in detail how historical phenomena are judged and assessed by both writers and readers.

Different traditions of discourse analysis, depending on whether they are rooted in post-structuralism, discursive psychology or conversation analysis (to name but a few), draw on quite different analytical tools. In this book, the tools of analysis are those developed within systemic functional linguistics.

How can discourse analysis be applied to educational contexts?

Discourse analysis has been a major research tool in much applied linguistic and educational research for several decades (see Christie, 2002; Coffin, 2001 for overviews). The main purpose of this type of analysis is to lay bare the way language works in educational contexts. In this book the context is school history and the analysis is used to provide a rich description of the way language works to make historical meaning, primarily in students' written texts. This is particularly pertinent in the current context, where, over the last two decades, the ability to read and write at different levels of sophistication has become an increasing concern for Western governments.

In Britain, for example, the present government has made literacy one of its key objectives and a number of significant policies and national strategies have been implemented (e.g. the National Literacy Strategy). This emphasis on literacy is largely due to the now commonly accepted view that literacy levels influence, if not predict, social and workplace success as well as citizens' access to, and critical participation in, the social, cultural, educational and vocational institutions and facilities of the culture (see Christie, 1990). However, there is still relatively little understanding of the precise nature of specialized literacies and the different types of reading and writing demands made on students in different subject areas and on citizens in different workplaces and social situations.

In Australia, too, throughout the last decade, there has been an increased emphasis on literacy education exemplified in the release of 'Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools' (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998). Significantly, this document emphasized that:

> Literacy learning is a life long process. Learners, at all stages of education, need support in dealing with an array of literacy demands – *with texts in the content areas of the curriculum* [my italics], with texts of increasing abstraction, with texts which use technical language, and with those texts which are brought into being by new information technologies.

The document thus endorses the view that students need support in developing control over the language and texts of specific curriculum areas. This recognition of the subject-specific nature of literacy is beginning to influence educational documents across the English-speaking world. In the UK, for

example, the Standards Site for the Department for Education and Skills now gives links to subject-specific 'language for learning objectives' as well as guidance on reading, writing, speaking and listening. This guidance is designed to be useful to subject teachers when planning schemes of work and planning for progression across units. In relation to history, here is an example of the type of guidance provided.

> In history, pupils produce many different types of text. They need to understand how texts are structured in order to produce historical writing that meets the need of different types of historical enquiry. They need to select, organize and deploy relevant information when producing texts, and making appropriate use of dates and terms.
>
> Historical writing also requires pupils to demonstrate different degrees of certainty in their prose. Pupils practise using the language of speculation and possibility, and qualifying a point. Pupils also need to understand the relationship between an argument and the supporting evidence, and between the general and the particular.
>
> When planning for progression in pupils' production of texts, history teachers should consider:
>
> - how to model the structure of different types of writing in history to enable pupils to be increasingly independent;
>
> (Department for Education and Skills, The Standards Site)

As is the case in the UK, recent educational policies and documents produced by Australian state education departments foreground the role of language in different curriculum areas. For example, the New South Wales 7–10 Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2003a) underlines that 'History is ideally suited to develop students' literacy skills' and that students need to learn how to construct a variety of texts for different purposes.

In sum, it is clear that UK and Australian policy-makers and educators are increasingly acknowledging the role of language in subject learning. However, there are few publications which unpack and make explicit what is meant by phrases such as 'how texts are structured in order to produce historical writing that meets the need of different types of historical enquiry'. Indeed, even in guidance documents such as the UK's National Strategy for literacy and learning in history (Department for Education and Skills, 2004), there is an absence of information on the types of text or uses of language specific to history.

In the USA, the relationship between language, literacy and learning is also increasingly being recognized as educationally significant. However, less well recognized and acknowledged in policy documents is the nature of the language of different curriculum areas and the relationship between developing language (including literacy) skills and learning subject matter. The links between language and learning are therefore rarely made explicit. For example, the California History/Social Science standards set out a framework of 'intellectual skills' to be developed from Kindergarten through to Grade Twelve, in which *interpretation* and *analysis* are given a key role

(California State Board of Education, 2000). However, the literacy and language skills necessary to achieve these are not spelled out.

Part of the aim of this book, therefore, is to articulate and make explicit the relationship between, for example, successful *analysis* and *interpretation* (i.e. students' ability to explain and argue about the past) and a developing control of language and literacy. This will be achieved by providing richer descriptions, and greater understanding, of the types of historical texts students have to read and write.

Why draw on systemic functional linguistics as a framework for discourse analysis?

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a branch of linguistics that has a strong functional orientation: it is concerned with how language makes meaning. Unlike traditional approaches to language and grammatical description, which are concerned with describing a system of rules, the systemic functional model describes how language is used in actual social situations, such as the history classroom. Systemic functional linguists are interested in describing varieties of language from the point of view of making this knowledge socially and/or educationally useful. In relation to history, the analytical tools of SFL make it possible to describe the specialized nature of its discourse in terms of the way texts are organized and the way grammatical and lexical patterns distinguish it from other subject areas.

The primary architect of SFL is Michael Halliday (e.g. 1978, 2004), but there are many more linguists who have been involved in developing and applying the model (e.g. Martin, 1992; Matthiessen, 1995). In terms of investigating historical discourse there have been several important studies (e.g. Eggins *et al.*, 1993; Martin and Wodak, 2003; North, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2004; Veel and Coffin, 1996; Wignell, 1994), and I am indebted to these researchers for drawing my attention to areas of interest and importance. Few previous studies, however, have provided a comprehensive description of historical discourse within schooling and it is in this area that I hope this book makes an important contribution. As I discuss in Chapter 8, such an explicit description of the linguistic constitution of school writing provides a firm basis for pedagogical interventions aimed at facilitating students' handling of historical discourse.

Who is the book for and how is it organized?

The book has been written with educational and applied linguists in mind – both students and practitioners – who are interested in seeing how linguistic research can be applied in ways that are educationally and socially useful. Equally, it is designed to be of interest to history professionals and educators who have some background or interest in language and linguistics. These include policy-makers, textbook writers, teacher trainers, language and literacy consultants as well as classroom teachers of history and English as an Additional Language (EAL).

It offers an introductory account to SFL theory for people interested in finding out more about how this approach can illuminate the way language works in a particular social context. To this end, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the aspects of the SFL model of particular relevance to this book. Any theoretical principles that are introduced in that chapter are grounded and illustrated throughout the subsequent chapters alongside further explanations of relevant linguistic tools. In case some terms are unfamiliar to readers, there is also a glossary. The structure of the rest of the book is as follows.

Chapter 2: The systemic functional linguistic approach to discourse analysis

Chapter 2 sets out the overall theoretical principles underpinning systemic functional linguistics and shows how a functional analysis can illuminate wider educational, social and cultural meanings. This is a chapter that some readers, depending on their linguistic background, may wish to return to and read in sections, as and when relevant.

Chapter 3: The role of the recording genres

Chapter 3 provides a general introduction to the three overarching purposes of writing about the past – recording, explaining and arguing about past events – and shows how these different purposes require different text structures (genres) and different uses of vocabulary and grammar. It then goes on to focus on the recording genres, showing how there are four distinct ways of recording the past. The implications for both reading and writing are considered, including the order in which students tend to develop control of history genres (in line with history curricula and syllabi).

Chapter 4: The role of the explaining and arguing genres

Chapter 4 examines the explaining and arguing genres in terms of their structure, key lexical and grammatical resources as well as their pedagogic role.

Chapter 5: Learning historically valued representations of time

Chapter 5 analyses the role of time in the discourse of history. It focuses on the way in which successful history students use vocabulary and grammar in order to move from personally oriented representations of time to ones that are historically valued.

Chapter 6: Building different types of causal explanations

Historians generally agree that cause-and-effect is central to historical writing and this chapter explains how successful students develop a repertoire of lexical and grammatical resources for construing different types of causal relations as they move through secondary school.

Chapter 7: Responding to, judging and assessing past events

This chapter examines the linguistic means for evaluating and re-evaluating historical phenomena in order to give new and different meanings to the past. Using what is referred to as the APPRAISAL framework, it looks at how different evaluative strategies operate across different history genres. These strategies involve using linguistic resources to respond to events emotionally, judge past behaviour within a moral framework and assess the weight and causal force of past events.

Chapter 8: Educational implications and applications

Chapter 8 summarizes the ways in which the language of history may not be transparent, particularly to those new to the subject. It suggests that it may be educationally useful to make historical discourse an object of study for both teachers and students on the basis that explicit, shared knowledge about its functions and structure can help students to critically analyse historical texts as well as independently construct their own interpretations of the past.

Appendix

The appendix provides, in graph form, the quantitative findings referred to at various points in the book. They are based on a detailed analysis of a corpus of 38 samples of student writing. The texts in this 'mini-corpus' were carefully selected to represent the most commonly recurring and successful types of text within the much larger corpus underpinning the general discussion.

Glossary

The glossary provides a reference for those readers who do not have a background in linguistics or are unfamiliar with terms within the systemic functional linguistic tradition.

Notes

1 Edward VII reigned as British monarch from 1841 to 1910.
2 All original errors in student writing have been preserved throughout the book and places where the writing is illegible are marked with xxxx). Where necessary, names have been changed in order to preserve anonymity.
3 Empathetic understanding is an approach to history and history teaching that arose out of the recognition that there is a gulf between our own age and previous ages, and that to understand the past we have to appreciate the values and attitudes of that time. Collingwood (1946), in particular, argued that to make sense of the past we have to make sense of people's mentalities in the past, i.e. all history is history of the mind. In a similar vein, Elton (1967, p. 31) stated that a historian has 'to understand a given problem from the inside'. In sum, empathy is concerned with the ability to enter into an informed appreciation of the predicaments or points of view of other people in the past. In history-teaching circles it has, however, been seen as problematic leading to continuous debate and contestation (see Phillips, 2002).
4 While secondary sources are generally used to refer to a contribution to knowledge about a past age written up later by a historian and often using primary sources, they may include other contributions such as TV and stage drama, film, historical fiction, museum reconstructions, models, re-enactments, etc. In this book, the term will largely be used to refer to the writings of historians and textbook authors.

   It should also be noted that, recently, in some history textbooks (e.g. Dawson, 2004) there has been a move to eliminate the distinction between primary and secondary sources on the basis that whether a source is primary or secondary depends on the question being asked.
5 Foucault, who can perhaps best be described as a social theorist, has had considerable influence on the practice of history. In particular, some historians and historiographers have drawn on his concept of discourse, which has a rather different meaning from that found in this book. For Foucault, discourse refers to the way in which knowledge is organized, talked about and acted upon in an institution (such as a prison, hospital, school or family). Specifically, discourses are systematically organized sets of statements that express the meaning and values of an institution. A good introduction to Foucault's writings is I. P. Rabinow (ed) (1984), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Panthenon.