



Language and power

*Norman Fairclough*

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LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL LIFE SERIES

Series Editor: Professor Christopher N. Candlin

*Language and Power* Norman Fairclough

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## General Editor's Preface

It is appropriate with the publication of its first book to indicate the intentions and scope of the new Language in Social Life Series, both to show how Norman Fairclough's Language and Power admirably provides its corner-stone and to encourage readers and other potential authors to join us in this imaginative enterprise.

Our objective is to focus on language in social life but with a particular agenda in mind. To highlight how language, in its everyday as well as professional usages enables us to understand issues of social concern. More specifically, to examine how the ways in which we communicate are constrained by the structures and forces of those social institutions within which we live and function. To display, too, how these institutions and our roles within them are in frequent measure defined by such particular language use. Such an agenda suggests three points of reference for books within the Series: on the one hand that of language, on the other that of social theory, and thirdly, that of the particular professional context providing as it were a location for critical linguistic exploration.

Each of these reference points, however, is necessarily defined in relation to each of the others. Language, in this Series, is no autonomous construct, simply a system of sentences, but language as discourse, as action; similarly, society is no mosaic of individual existences looked in some stratified structure but a dynamic formation of relationships and practices constituted in large measure by struggles for power; professions not as guilds but as institutions whose conventions are ideologically shaped by such social relationships and realised through such particular discourses.

Characteristic of books in the Series will be their attitude to the relationship between theory and practice. It is expected that they will make a theoretical contribution to our understanding of

language and society, exploring especially how they interconnect, but this contribution will arise from the description and interpretation of practice, accounting for what takes place. The intimacy of theory and practice is not by chance; it is crucial if we are to relate actions that are specific and local to the social institutions that give rise to them and if we are to explain what transpires in terms of theories of modern society.

To achieve this lays a responsibility upon the writer; he or she seeks after all a triple respectability, in relation to language and linguistics, to society and sociology and, most importantly, to those professional groups whose actions provide the data and the motivation for the descriptions, interpretations and explanations of the books which the Series will publish. We have, then, by necessity a multiple audience, which, while we hope it is a supportive and not adversarial one, is unlikely to be equally conversant in these three worlds. The books will have to make the connections, show the interdependence and display the relevance of the design.

To achieve this we are constructing books which reflect a general pattern, aimed at the engagement of the reader. One which emphasises problem-sensing (what are the linguistic, social and professional dimensions of the topic in question), problem-identifying (how the topic can be illuminated through the procedures of critical discourse analysis), problem-solving (what action may be undertaken in respect of the issues explored through the analysis in question). We are in no doubt that of these the third is the most problematic. Necessarily so, since it lies outside any book and is not in our hands. To ignore it, however, would rob the Series of its engagement with social action and its *raison d'être*. We hope that the various measures undertaken in the composition of the books in the Series, and their style, will make this commitment to action plain.

I referred earlier to how this book provided the cornerstone to the Language in Social Life Series. Let me expand on the reasons for saying so. Norman Fairclough begins by defining the characteristics of Critical Language Study, distinguishing it from those other orientations within Linguistics which have sought to connect language with society. Central here are two assertions: that language is social practice and not a phenomenon external to society to be adventitiously correlated with it, and that language seen as discourse rather than as accomplished text

compels us to take account not only of the artefacts of language, the products that we hear and see, but also the conditions of production and interpretation of texts, in sum the process of communicating of which the text is only a part. This emphasis is of central importance for Linguistics. It marks a movement away from the merely descriptive towards the interpretative, to an inclusion of the participants in the linguistic process, to a reconciliation of the psychological and the social with the textual, which radically alters the map of conventional linguistic study.

As importantly for Sociology as for Linguistics, he constructs a theory in which the connections between the orders of discourse (in Foucault's terms) the motivated and conventionalised selections from available linguistic options, and the orders of society are shown to be co-determined. To explore the one is to begin the explanation of the other. Such an explanatory process is most conveniently and most tellingly undertaken through the analysis of communication in particular social institutions, thus tying the macro analysis of society with the micro analysis of particular social exchanges. The arguments adduced here are important for students of social theory. They tie the abstractions of Bourdieu, Foucault and Habermas to the actualities of encounters, linking the work of British and Australian "critical linguists" (Fowler, Kress, Martin and others) to the mainstream of European social theory.

In other ways, too, this book exemplifies the Series of which it is the initiator. Throughout, Norman Fairclough offers his readers a carefully illustrated guide to the practice of the theory, selecting key texts for analysis and exploration, offering his own interpretations and explanations to be challenged by the reader with a different social history to his own. In sum, providing a discrete working out of the principles of Critical Language Study announced in his introductory Chapter.

From this analysis and exploration two salient principles emerge. The first, that of the primacy of particular research sites, is one already identified in distinct circumstances by Gumperz. On this view, research sites are not of equivalent salience and value to critical linguists. Rather than expending analysis on linguistic objects *trouvés* (in Jakob Mey's telling phrase) the texts that so to speak fall off the back of trucks and bear no special social significance, we should address our talents as explorers and explainers to those texts which evidence crucial moments in

discourse where participants may be placed at social risk during the communication, suffering disadvantage in consequence of the inequalities of communication. Occasions spring to mind easily: in medical, legal, educational, caring encounters, instances of interethnic miscommunication where life chances are at stake, migrant learners in an alien society, children at school, the speech and the hearing disadvantaged.

The second principle refers to the selection from the structures and modes of language itself. Critical language study identifies particular areas of language as having the greatest meaning potential for the understanding of the social process, privileging certain options from the whole array of features which are present for analysis. (Chapters 5 and 6 within the book carefully outline these features and demonstrate how such an explanatory analysis can be carried out on the chosen texts. Here Norman Fairclough's distinctions between the experiential, relational and expressive values of linguistic features are of considerable significance for discourse analysts and linguists more generally, especially those in the Hallidayan tradition.) Notable here is the discussion of intertextuality, in particular how the concept of social and interpersonal struggle can be seen working out, as it were, in the structures of discourse. The extended case-study of the discourse of Thatcherism provides an exemplary model.

We identified earlier one role of the Language in Social Life Series as the advancing of particular causes in the context of the need for social change. We did so not because we naively attribute to language either the ultimate cause of current disorders and inequities or, more romantically perhaps, because we believe that greater awareness of language in critical linguistic terms will easily restore or create the equilibrium many seek, but because it is our belief that an understanding of the social order is most conveniently and naturally achieved through a critical awareness of the power of language. More directly even, that access to and participation in the power forums of society is dependent on knowing the language of those forums and how using that language power enables personal and social goals to be achieved. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that Chapter 9 of this book addresses this central question and especially so in relation to language education in the school. In many countries and many educational systems there is current concern surrounding the need for an enhanced communicative competence among school

children from all social backgrounds. It is in itself interesting, and not perhaps surprising, that most concern centres around the concept of language deficit and attributes causes of such deficit to the inadequate learning by certain pupils of language seen as text. Now there are notable exceptions both to this focus and to its implied remedy, some of the most imaginative in fact from within Australia; what Norman Fairclough's book demonstrates very clearly is the implausibility of such a narrow definition of communicative incompetence in terms of text, the need to connect discursial study and teaching to an understanding of contemporary society, and to see the critical consciousness of discourse as a basis for social emancipation.

Language and power, language is power; these are the themes of this first book in this new Series. The groundwork is laid, both linguistically and social theoretically, for the volumes that will follow. Several are in production or in active preparation, illuminating different professional worlds and exploring particular crucial communicative sites. All will derive benefit and a grounding from Norman Fairclough's book. It is a source of much personal pleasure to me as an erstwhile colleague and collaborator at the University of Lancaster where many of the ideas contained here were debated in detail, that his book has set this new Series off to such a productive start.

Christopher N Candlin  
General Editor  
Macquarie University, Sydney

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ONE

*Introduction: critical language study*

'How do we recognize the shackles that tradition has placed upon us?  
For if we can recognize them, we are also able to break them.'

*Franz Boas*

This book is about language and power, or more precisely about connections between language use and unequal relations of power, particularly in modern Britain. I have written it for two main purposes. The first is more theoretical: to help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power. The second is more practical: to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation.

The more theoretical objective stems from my own academic background, which is in linguistics. Linguists, and especially those working in sociolinguistics (which is often said to deal with 'language in its social context') have had quite a lot to say about language and power, but they have not in my opinion done justice to the rich and complex interrelationships of language and power. There are for example many studies of 'standard' and 'nonstandard' social dialects, and of how the amount of prestige which attaches to such dialects depends on the power of their users. There have also been studies of the ways in which power is exercised in conversation and other forms of talk between people, though perhaps surprisingly few. These studies have generally set out to *describe* prevailing sociolinguistic conventions in terms of how they distribute power unequally; they have not set out to *explain* these conventions as the product of relations of power and struggles for power. The point is that sociolinguistic conventions have a dual relation to power: on the one hand they



incorporate differences of power, on the other hand they arise out of – and give rise to – particular relations of power.

My main focus in this book will be on the second of these – on trying to explain existing conventions as the outcome of power relations and power struggle. My approach will put particular emphasis upon 'common-sense' assumptions which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically, and of which people are generally not consciously aware. An example would be how the conventions for a traditional type of consultation between doctors and patients embody 'common-sense' assumptions which treat authority and hierarchy as natural – the doctor knows about medicine and the patient doesn't; the doctor is in a position to determine how a health problem should be dealt with and the patient isn't; it is right (and 'natural') that the doctor should make the decisions and control the course of the consultation and of the treatment, and that the patient should comply and cooperate; and so on. A crucial point is that it is possible, as we shall see, to find assumptions of this sort embedded in the forms of language that are used.

Such assumptions are *ideologies*. Ideologies are closely linked to power, because the nature of the ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions; and because they are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted. Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the form of social behaviour where we rely most on 'common-sense' assumptions. But despite its importance for language, the concept of 'ideology' has very rarely figured in discussions of language and power within linguistics, which is itself symptomatic of their limitations.

It is not just because it has been neglected that I have chosen to focus upon the relatively neglected ideological dimension. My main reason for this choice is that the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language. We live in a linguistic epoch, as major contemporary social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas have recognized in the increasing importance they

have given to language in their theories. Some people refer to 'the linguistic turn' in social theory – though more recently, writers on 'postmodernism' have claimed that visual images are ousting language, and have referred to postmodernist culture as 'post-linguistic'. It is not just that language has become perhaps the primary medium of social control and power, though that is noteworthy enough; language has grown dramatically in terms of the uses it is required to serve, in terms of the range of language varieties, and in terms of the complexity of the language capacities that are expected of the modern citizen. (If, as I shall argue, ideology is pervasively present in language, that fact ought to mean that the ideological nature of language should be one of the major themes of modern social science.)

Language is therefore important enough to merit the attention of all citizens. In particular, so far as this book is concerned, nobody who has an interest in modern society, and certainly nobody who has an interest in relationships of power in modern society, can afford to ignore language. That, to some degree or other, means everyone. Nevertheless, many people with precisely such interests have believed they could safely ignore language. This is perhaps not surprising, for the general level of attention and sensitivity to language has been woefully inadequate, and in particular the teaching of language in schools has to a remarkable extent contrived to ignore its most decisive social functions. This cannot be blamed on the teachers, because the same is true of most of the academic work on language which the teachers have been offered as models. This gap between the level of consciousness which the contemporary position of language demands, and the level it actually attracts, is another reason for my choice of focus.

(It is important to emphasize that I am not suggesting that power is just a matter of language.) There is always a danger, in focusing upon one aspect of a social relation or process, of being tempted to reduce it to that aspect alone, especially if as in this case it is a neglected aspect. (Power exists in various modalities, including the concrete and unmistakable modality of physical force.) It is a fact, if a sad fact, that power is often enough exercised through depriving people of their jobs, their homes, and their lives, as recent events in for example South Africa have reminded us. It is perhaps helpful to make a broad distinction between the exercise of power through coercion of various sorts

including physical violence, and the exercise of power through the manufacture of *consent* to or at least acquiescence towards it. Power relations depend on both, though in varying proportions. Ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent.

The more practical objective mentioned in the opening paragraph is to help increase consciousness of language and power, and particularly of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others. Given my focus on ideology, this means helping people to see the extent to which their language does rest upon common-sense assumptions, and the ways in which these common-sense assumptions can be ideologically shaped by relations of power. Although I shall be painting a somewhat depressing picture of language being increasingly caught up in domination and oppression, this will I hope be offset by my faith in the capacity of human beings to change what human beings have created. Resistance and change are not only possible but continuously happening. But the effectiveness of resistance and the realization of change depend on people developing a critical consciousness of domination and its modalities, rather than just experiencing them. The more practical objective of this book is therefore to make a contribution to the general raising of consciousness of exploitative social relations, through focusing upon language.

My aim has been to write a book which is accessible not only to students and teachers in higher education, but also to a variety of people in other spheres, and I have correspondingly not assumed that readers have specialist backgrounds in language study or indeed in social theory, though I imagine that most readers will have some acquaintance with one or the other. I have had in mind in particular those who are or may eventually be in a position to act as educators in a broad sense – who may be able to draw upon books such as this in order to produce appropriate informative or teaching materials suited to the particular needs and circumstances of particular groupings of people. This would include, most obviously, students, teachers and teacher trainers, and those who are involved in various forms of specialist vocational or professional training (of health workers or social workers, for instance). But there may be others, such as political and trade union activists, or activists in the peace, feminist, black,

or other social movements, part of whose work is educational in this broader sense.

I have tried to make this book as accessible and as practically usable as possible, but no matter how practically organized a book of this sort may be, it is clearly not enough on its own for reaching the majority of the people who could make good use of some form of critical language analysis – and that, as I have said, really includes everyone. It needs to be complemented by pamphlets, leaflets, and other types of material (film, video, cartoons) which many people find more digestible than books. My hope is that among the readers of this book there will be educators who will be able to take this work forward.

I am sure that readers will have already formed some impression of the political position from which I am writing this book. It is widely understood that people researching and writing about social matters are inevitably influenced in the way they perceive them, as well as in their choice of topics and the way they approach them, by their own social experiences and values and political commitments. I think it is important not only to acknowledge these influences rather than affecting a spurious neutrality about social issues, but also to be open with one's readers about where one stands. I shall spell out in some detail my view of the society I belong to in Chapter 2; for the moment, let me say that I write as a socialist with a generally low opinion of the social relationships in my society and a commitment to the emancipation of the people who are oppressed by them. This does not, I hope, mean that I am writing political propaganda. The scientific investigation of social matters is perfectly compatible with committed and 'opinionated' investigators (there are no others!), and being committed does not excuse you from arguing rationally or producing evidence for your statements.

The approach to language which will be adopted here will be called *critical language study*, or CLS for short. *Critical* is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people – such as the connections between language, power and ideology referred to above. CLS analyses social interactions in a way which focuses upon their linguistic elements, and which sets out to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system.

## APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE STUDY

There are many existing approaches to the study of language, so why do we need CLS? Because, while each of the approaches which I review below has something to contribute to CLS, they all have major limitations from a critical point of view. Just as important, the relationship which is standardly assumed to hold between these various branches of language study is itself unsatisfactory in a critical perspective, a point which I develop at the end of this section. The approaches to language study which I shall review are those of: linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence, conversation and discourse analysis. I shall also say something about views of language in recent social theory. My aim is only to give a brief characterization of these complex areas of study from a critical perspective, and I shall refer mostly to 'mainstream' work, although most of them include other work which is in contention with the mainstream, and sometimes closer to a critical perspective than the mainstream.

### Linguistics

The term *linguistics* is used ambiguously within the mainstream: it sometimes refers to all the branches of language study which are inside the academic discipline of linguistics (some are not), but it sometimes refers just to the branch which has the most privileged status, 'linguistics proper' as people occasionally say. I am referring here to 'linguistics proper', which is the study of 'grammar' in a broad sense: the sound systems of language ('phonology'), the grammatical structure of words ('morphology') and of sentences ('syntax'), and more formal aspects of meaning ('semantics'). Linguistics has won widespread acceptance within the human sciences and beyond for the centrality of language among human phenomena, and of language study among the human sciences. It has done so by developing an impressive array of systematic techniques for the description of language which have been widely drawn upon as models in other human sciences, and which any modern approach to language study (including CLS) can benefit from.

However, the achievements of linguistics have been bought at the price of a narrow conception of language study. It is a

paradoxical fact that linguistics has given relatively little attention to actual speech or writing; it has characterized language as a potential, a system, an abstract competence, rather than attempting to describe actual language practice. In the terms of Ferdinand de Saussure, a founder of modern linguistics, linguistics is concerned with the study of *langue*, 'language', rather than *parole*, 'speaking'. Mainstream linguistics has taken two crucial assumptions about *langue* from Saussure: that the language of a particular community can for all practical purposes be regarded as invariant across that community, and that the study of *langue* ought to be 'synchronic' rather than historical – it ought to be studied as a static system at a given point in time, not dynamically as it changes through time. These assumptions and the neglect of language practice result in an idealized view of language, which isolates it from the social and historical matrix outside of which it cannot actually exist. Mainstream linguistics is an asocial way of studying language, which has nothing to say about relationships between language and power and ideology.

### Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics has developed, partly under the influence of disciplines outside linguistics (notably anthropology and sociology), in reaction to the neglect by 'linguistics proper' of socially conditioned variation in language. Some practitioners see sociolinguistics as complementary to 'linguistics proper': the latter studies the invariant language system, whereas the former studies socially variable language practice ('use'). Others see sociolinguistics as challenging socially unrealistic aspects of mainstream linguistics. Sociolinguistics has shown systematic correlations between variations in linguistic form (phonological, morphological, syntactic) and social variables – the social strata to which speakers belong, social relationships between participants in linguistic interactions, differences in social setting or occasion, differences of topic, and so on. It is thanks to sociolinguistics that the socially constituted nature of language practice can be taken as a general premiss of CLS.

But sociolinguistics is heavily influenced by 'positivist' conceptions of social science: sociolinguistic variation in a particular society tends to be seen in terms of sets of facts to be observed and described using methods analogous to those of natural

science. Sociolinguistics is strong on 'what?' questions (what are the facts of variation?) but weak on 'why?' and 'how?' questions (why are the facts as they are?; how – in terms of the development of social relationships of power – was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being?; how is it sustained?; and how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?).

The tendency to take facts at face value is connected with the treatment of social class. The term *social class* is used, but it is often used to refer to what might better be referred to as 'social strata' – groupings of people who are similar to one another in occupation, education or other standard sociological variables. Social classes in the classical Marxist sense are social forces which occupy different positions in economic production, which have different and antagonistic interests, and whose struggle is what determines the course of social history. In terms of this conception of social class, the sociolinguistic facts can be seen as the outcome of class struggle and represent a particular balance of forces between classes. This conception of social class points to the 'why?' and 'how?' questions.

Also connected with the positivist orientation to facts is the general insensitivity of sociolinguistics towards its own relationship to the sociolinguistic orders it seeks to describe. When one focuses on the simple existence of facts without attending to the social conditions which made them so and the social conditions for their potential change, the notion that the sociolinguist herself might somehow affect the facts hardly seems to arise. But it does arise in the alternative scenario I have sketched out: if the facts of the existing sociolinguistic order are seen as lines of tension, as a temporary configuration representing the current balance of class forces, then the effect of sociolinguistic research might either be to legitimize these facts and so indirectly the power relations which underlie them, or to show the contingency of these facts despite their apparent solidity, and so indirectly point to ways of changing them. For instance, sociolinguistics has often described sociolinguistic conventions in terms of what are the 'appropriate' linguistic forms for a given social situation; whatever the intention, this terminology is likely to lend legitimacy to 'the facts' and their underlying power relations.

## Pragmatics

We need to distinguish a broad continental European conception of pragmatics as 'the science of language use' (according to the first issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics*) and a much narrower Anglo-American conception of pragmatics as just one of a number of sub-disciplines which deal with language use, including sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. There are tendencies within pragmatics in the former sense which amount to what I am calling CLS. However, I shall comment on the Anglo-American tradition only, because that is the one most familiar in the English-language literature.

Anglo-American pragmatics is closely associated with analytical philosophy, particularly with the work of Austin and Searle on 'speech acts'. The key insight is that language can be seen as a form of action: that spoken or written utterances constitute the performance of speech acts such as promising or asking or asserting or warning; or, on a different plane, referring to people or things, presupposing the existence of people or things or the truth of propositions, and implicating meanings which are not overtly expressed. The idea of uttering as acting is an important one, and it is also central to CLS in the form of the claim, presented in Chapter 2, that discourse is social practice.

The main weakness of pragmatics from a critical point of view is its individualism: 'action' is thought of atomistically as emanating wholly from the individual, and is often conceptualized in terms of the 'strategies' adopted by the individual speaker to achieve her 'goals' or 'intentions'. This understates the extent to which people are caught up in, constrained by, and indeed derive their individual identities from social conventions, and gives the implausible impression that conventionalized ways of speaking or writing are 'reinvented' on each occasion of their use by the speaker generating a suitable strategy for her particular goals. And it correspondingly overstates the extent to which people manipulate language for strategic purposes. Of course, people do act strategically in certain circumstances and use conventions rather than simply following them; but in other circumstances they do simply follow them, and what one needs is a theory of social action – social practice – which accounts for both the determining effect of conventions and the strategic crea-

tivity of individual speakers, without reducing practice to one or the other.

The individuals postulated in pragmatics, moreover, are generally assumed to be involved in cooperative interactions whose ground rules they have equal control over, and to which they are able to contribute equally. Cooperative interaction between equals is elevated into a prototype for social interaction in general, rather than being seen as a form of interaction whose occurrence is limited and socially constrained. The result is an idealized and Utopian image of verbal interaction which is in stark contrast with the image offered by CLS of a sociolinguistic order moulded in social struggles and riven with inequalities of power. Pragmatics often appears to describe discourse as it might be in a better world, rather than discourse as it is.

Pragmatics is also limited in having been mainly developed with reference to single invented utterances rather than real extended discourse, and central notions like 'speech act' have turned out to be problematic when people try to use them to analyse real discourse. Finally, Anglo-American pragmatics bears the scars of the way in which it has developed in relation to 'linguistics proper'. While it has provided a space for investigating the interdependence of language and social context which was not available before its inception, it is a strictly constrained space, for pragmatics tends to be seen as an additional 'level' of language study which fills in gaps left by the more 'core' levels of grammar and semantics. Social context is acknowledged but kept in its place, which does it less than justice.

### Cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence

One of the concerns of pragmatics has been with the discrepancies which standardly exist between what is said and what is meant, and with how people work out what is meant from what is said; but the detailed investigation of the processes of comprehension involved, as well as of processes of production, has been undertaken by cognitive psychologists, and workers in artificial intelligence concerned with the computer simulation of production and comprehension. From the perspective of CLS, the most important result of work on comprehension is the stress which has been placed upon its active nature: you do not simply 'decode' an utterance, you arrive at an interpretation through an

active process of matching features of the utterance at various levels with representations you have stored in your long-term memory. These representations are prototypes for a very diverse collection of things – the shapes of words, the grammatical forms of sentences, the typical structure of a narrative, the properties of types of object and person, the expected sequence of events in a particular situation type, and so forth. Some of these are linguistic, and some of them are not. Anticipating later discussion, let us refer to these prototypes collectively as '*members' resources*', or MR for short. The main point is that comprehension is the outcome of interactions between the utterance being interpreted, and MR.

Not surprisingly, cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence have given little attention to the social origins or significance of MR. I shall argue later that attention to the processes of production and comprehension is essential to an understanding of the interrelations of language, power and ideology, and that this is so because MR are socially determined and ideologically shaped, though their 'common sense' and automatic character typically disguises that fact. Routine and unselfconscious resort to MR in the ordinary business of discourse is, I shall suggest, a powerful mechanism for sustaining the relations of power which ultimately underlie them.

### Conversation analysis and discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has recently been described as a new 'cross-discipline', to which many established disciplines (linguistics, sociology, anthropology, cognitive psychology among others) have contributed. There are strands within discourse analysis in this extended sense which are close to what I am calling CLS. I shall concentrate on conversation analysis, which is one prominent approach within discourse analysis that has been developed by a group of sociologists known as 'ethnomethodologists'.

Ethnomethodologists investigate the production and interpretation of everyday action as skilled accomplishments of social actors, and they are interested in conversation as one particularly pervasive instance of skilled social action. One of the strengths of conversation analysis is that it works with extended samples of real conversation. It has demonstrated that conversation is systematically structured, and that there is evidence of the orien-

tation of participants to these structures in the ways in which they design their own conversational turns and react to those of others. These structures are social structures: one of the main concerns is to show that social structures are present and produced in everyday action, and are not just a property of abstract societal macrostructures.

But conversation analysis has been resistant to making connections between such 'micro' structures of conversation and the 'macro' structures of social institutions and societies. As a result, it gives a rather implausible image (similar to the image I attributed to pragmatics) of conversation as a skilled social practice existing in a social vacuum, as if talk were generally engaged in just for its own sake. This image is reinforced by the privileged status assigned to casual conversation between equals, especially telephone conversation, where the determinative effect of institutional and societal structures is perhaps least evident, though nonetheless real. It is also reinforced by the focus upon conversation as an accomplishment of the social actors who produce it, and the corresponding emphasis in the analysis upon the actor's perspective, which typically experiences the conventions of everyday action as just commonsensically 'there', rather than determined by and determinative of wider social structures. Conversation analysis is open to the criticism directed above at sociolinguistics, that it answers 'what?' questions but not 'how?' and 'why?' questions.

#### Some recent social theory

Finally, let me briefly mention recent contributions to social theory which have explored the role of language in the exercise, maintenance and change of power. I shall refer to just three such contributions. The first is work on the theory of ideology, which on the one hand has pointed to the increasing relative importance of ideology as a mechanism of power in modern society, as against the exercise of power through coercive means, and on the other hand has come to see language as a (or indeed the) major locus of ideology, and so of major significance with respect to power. The second is the influential work of Michel Foucault, which has ascribed a central role to discourse in the development of specifically modern forms of power. And the third is the equally influential work of Jürgen Habermas, whose 'theory of

communicative action' highlights the way in which our currently distorted communication nevertheless foreshadows communication without such constraints. The main limitation of these contributions from the perspective of CLS is that they remain theoretical – they are not operationalized in the analysis of particular instances of discourse.

#### Relationship of CLS to these approaches

Ultimately, CLS is probably best understood not as just another approach to language study which complements those I have referred to by highlighting issues which they tend to ignore, but as an alternative orientation to language study which implies a different demarcation of language study into approaches or branches, different relationships between them, and different orientations within each of them. To fully elaborate this claim would need another book, and I shall limit myself to just quickly illustrating what I have in mind.

One aspect of power is the capacity to impose and maintain a particular structuring of some domain or other – a particular way of dividing it into parts, of keeping the parts demarcated from each other, and a particular ordering of those parts in terms of hierarchical relations of domination and subordination. Mainstream linguistics has imposed such a structuring on language study: the approaches I have been referring to are some of the 'parts' it differentiates, and 'linguistics proper' is privileged within this structuring of language study. All of the other approaches tend to be regarded as sub-disciplines which extend the results of 'linguistics proper' in various specialized directions – though they sometimes resist such subordination. From a critical perspective, this is unsatisfactory, both because branches of language study which belong closely together tend to be kept apart – this is the case for sociolinguistics and pragmatics, and for sociolinguistics and psychological work on production and comprehension, for example – and because it relegates the social nature of language to a sub-discipline. CLS would place a broad conception of the social study of language at the core of language study. It would also favour certain emphases within the various branches of study: for instance, in the study of grammar it would find 'functionalist' approaches (such as that of the systemic linguistics associated particularly with Michael Halliday) more

helpful than 'formalist' approaches (such as that of Noam Chomsky and his associates).

It is not, however, within the scope of the present book to put forward a fully-fledged alternative to mainstream linguistics. Readers interested in such alternatives might wish to look at various existing proposals which move to some extent in that direction, and which harmonize to a degree with CLS: systemic linguistics, continental pragmatics, or cross-disciplinary trends in discourse analysis. As far as the present book is concerned, the focus is upon doing critical analyses of discourse samples; it will make some use of all the approaches I have referred to, but attempts to go beyond them in providing a synthesis of necessary theoretical concepts and analytical frameworks for doing critical analyses.

#### USING THIS BOOK

This book can be used as a coursebook, for informal group discussion, or by individual readers. I am assuming that in all cases readers will wish to be actively involved in doing CLS, rather than just reading about it. This orientation to doing analysis is built into the book in two main ways. Firstly, readers are invited to comment upon texts or carry out various other short exercises in most of the chapters below. In some cases, I give my own answers to reader-directed questions, in others I do not. These answers are *not* to be regarded as 'right'; they are merely there to give readers something against which to compare their own answers, particularly when the book is being used outside a class or group context. Readers' answers are likely to differ from mine, and this should be regarded not as grounds for consternation, but as worth exploring in itself. It may be due, for instance, to differences in the MR brought to the task of interpreting the text, which are just as important in determining how a text is interpreted as what is in the text itself. The second aspect of the orientation to analysis is the procedure for analysis which is presented in Chapters 5 and 6 (see below).

Here is a summary of chapter contents:

- **Chapters 2, 3 and 4** anchor the rest of the book theoretically. They set out a view of the interrelationship of language and society, with the emphasis upon power and ideology. The gist

of my position is that language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power. Chapter 2 gives a general picture of the place of language in society, Chapters 3 and 4 focus respectively upon power and ideology.

- **Chapters 5 and 6** give a systematic presentation of a procedure for critical analysis. Chapter 5 deals with the description of texts, and Chapter 6 focuses on processes of producing and interpreting texts, and the analysis of their social determinants and effects. See Chapter 2 for these distinctions.
- **Chapters 7 and 8** explore change in discourse in relation to change in society. In Chapter 7, the emphasis is on individual creativity and its social conditions, with a case study on the political discourse of Thatcherism, which is used for an extended application of the procedure of Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 8, the focus shifts to large-scale tendencies in contemporary discourse in relation to main directions of change in contemporary capitalist society, drawing loosely upon some recent social theory (especially Habermas and Foucault).
- **Chapter 9** brings into focus an issue which is present throughout the book: how CLS could contribute to struggles for social emancipation. The chapter also suggests how readers might develop their interest in CLS.

Finally, a note on style. I have written in the first person, rather than disguise my personal views and interpretations in the 'impersonal' style which is more traditional in academic work. And I have operated with an image of the reader as not just someone to whom I am telling things (though sometimes I am!), but also as a partner in a collaborative venture. This is why I have sometimes used the pronoun 'we' inclusively, to refer to the reader and myself. But as I suggest in Chapter 5, this use of 'we' can be manipulative; it can claim a spurious solidarity, for instance when a politician uses it to convince people that she is 'one of them'. I hope that readers will not feel similarly dragooned into partnership: obviously, some readers will not see themselves as partners in critical discourse analysis, but in view of the practical objectives of the book, I have found it easier to write as if they did. This connects with a general risk run by

writers on CLS: their critical apparatus is liable to be applied to their own writing, almost certainly with some success, because the impress of power and ideology on language is not self-evident, and it is not something that you can necessarily escape from in particular instances by virtue of being aware of it in general.

#### REFERENCES

Kramarae C *et al.* 1984 is a recent collection of papers on language and power written generally from a perspective which is different from mine. On ideology, see McLellan D 1986, and on the relation between ideology, power and language, see Thompson J B 1984. The following are representative of the various approaches to language study referred to: Fromkin V, Rodman R 1983 (linguistics); Downes W 1984 (sociolinguistics); Levinson S 1983 (pragmatics); van Dijk T, Kintsch W 1983 (cognitive psychology); Stubbs M 1983 (discourse analysis); Atkinson J M, Heritage J 1984 (conversation analysis). The description of discourse analysis as a new 'cross-discipline' is from the editor's introduction to the first volume of van Dijk T 1985; Mey J 1985 is representative of continental pragmatics; Halliday M A K 1978 sets out the perspective of systemic linguistics. On views of language in recent social theory, see: Dreyfus H L, Rabinow P 1982; McCarthy T 1978; and Thompson J B 1984. On postmodernism, see Jameson F 1984.

## TWO

### *Discourse as social practice*

This chapter gives a general picture of the place of language in society, which is developed in more specific terms in later chapters. It is most closely linked to Chapters 3 and 4, which elaborate this general picture in terms of, respectively, the relationship between language and power, and the relationship between language and ideology. Together, these three chapters present the main elements of the position which I am adopting in this book on the place of language in society: that language is centrally involved in power, and struggles for power, and that it is so involved through its ideological properties.

Let me summarize the major themes of Chapter 2 under its main section headings:

- **Language and discourse:** the conception of language we need for CLS is *discourse*, language as social practice determined by social structures.
- **Discourse and orders of discourse:** actual discourse is determined by socially constituted *orders of discourse*, sets of conventions associated with social institutions.
- **Class and power in capitalist society:** orders of discourse are ideologically shaped by power relations in social institutions and in society as a whole.
- **Dialectic of structures and practices:** discourse has effects upon social structures, as well as being determined by them, and so contributes to social continuity and social change.

#### AN EXAMPLE

As I said above, this chapter will be discussing language and society in relatively general terms which will be made more specific in later chapters. It does not lend itself as easily to textual



illustrations of points as chapters 3 and 4 do, and it will therefore perhaps be helpful to have a concrete example which can be used to give a preliminary illustration of some of the main themes, and which we can also refer back to later in the chapter.

This text is part of an interview in a police station, involving the witness to an armed robbery (w) and a policeman (p), in which basic information elicitation is going on. w, who is rather shaken by the experience, is being asked what happened, p is recording the information elicited in writing.

- (1) p: Did you get a look at the one in the car?
- (2) w: I saw his face, yeah.
- (3) p: What sort of age was he?
- (4) w: About 45. He was wearing a . . .
- (5) p: And how tall?
- (6) w: Six foot one.
- (7) p: Six foot one. Hair?
- (8) w: Dark and curly. Is this going to take long? I've got to collect the kids from school.
- (9) p: Not much longer, no. What about his clothes?
- (10) w: He was a bit scruffy-looking, blue trousers, black . . .
- (11) p: Jeans?
- (12) w: Yeah.

How would you characterize the relationship between the police interviewer and w in this case, and how is it expressed in what is said?

The relationship is an unequal one, with the police interviewer firmly in control of the way the interview develops and of w's contribution to it, and taking no trouble to mitigate the demands he makes of her. Thus questions which might be quite painful for someone who has just witnessed a violent crime are never mitigated; p's question in turn 1, for example, might have been in a mitigated form such as *did you by any chance manage to get a good look at the one in the* instead of the bald form in which it actually occurs. In some cases, questions are reduced to words or minimal phrases – *how tall* in turn 5, and *hair* in turn 7. Such reduced questions are typical when one person is filling in a form 'for' another, as p is here; what is interesting is that the sensitive nature of the situation does not override the norms of form-filling. It is also noticeable that there is no acknowledgement of, still less thanks for, the information w supplies. Another feature is the way in which the interviewer checks what w has said in 7. Notice finally how control is exercised over w's contributions: p interrupts w's turn in 5 and 11,

and in 9 p gives a minimal answer to w's question about how much longer the interview will take, not acknowledging her problem, and immediately asks another question thus closing off w's interpellation.

Would we be justified in saying that these properties are *arbitrary*? In one sense, they are, because they could be different. In another sense, however, they are anything but arbitrary: they are determined by social conditions, more specifically by the nature of the relationship between the police and members of the 'public' in our society, and indeed they are *part* of that relationship. If that relationship were to undergo dramatic changes – if members of local communities were elected by those communities to act as police officers on a triennial renewable basis, for instance – we can be pretty confident that police/'public' discourse would change too. This illustrates one major contention of this chapter – that social conditions determine properties of discourse.

Another is that we ought to be concerned with the processes of producing and interpreting texts, and with how these cognitive processes are socially shaped and relative to social conventions, not just with texts themselves. Consider for instance how w interprets the absence of any acknowledgement by the policeman of the information she supplies. If something similar happened in a friendly conversation, it would be experienced by participants as a real absence and a problem, maybe an indication of disbelief or embarrassment, and one would expect to find its problematical character reflected in formal features of the text (such as an 'embarrassed silence' or signs of hesitation). In the police interview, acknowledgement would I think not generally be expected, so its absence would not be experienced as a problem for someone in tune with the conventions for such interviews. This does indeed appear to be the case for w. The example illustrates that the way people interpret features of texts depends upon which social – more specifically, discursive – conventions they are assuming to hold.

Finally, in this chapter I shall be highlighting not only the social determination of language use, but also the linguistic determination of society. Thus, for instance, one wishes to know to what extent the positions which are set up for members of the 'public' in the order of discourse of policing are passively occupied by them. In our example, w does indeed seem to be a fully compliant witness. In so far as such positions are compliantly occupied, the