Mediated Discourse as Social Interaction

A Study of News Discourse

Ron Scollon

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Author's Preface

This book is an attempt to bridge the gap between media studies and social interactionist discursive research. Media studies and studies of interactional sociolinguistics have until now not been viewed as mutually relevant fields of study. There is a serious gap, however, now recognized in media studies between analyses of texts and their production and studies of audience reception and behaviour. While a number of media analysts have taken up an interest in ethnographic study of audience behaviour, they are coming to this study with relatively little background in, or awareness of, the very extensive body of research in face-to-face social interaction. Interactional sociolinguistics from conversational analysis to ethnomethodology, on the other hand, while producing important insights into the nature of discursive behaviour in face-to-face interaction, has been methodologically and theoretically uninterested in coming to grips with mediated discourse. There have been virtually no studies of the social practices by which the discourses of the media are appropriated in common face-to-face interactions. On the one hand, media studies needs interactional sociolinguistics to open up to more reflective studies of media audiences. At the same time, interactional sociolinguistics needs media studies to enrich its understanding of the ever-increasing place of the texts of the media in daily social interactions. This book engages these two separate disciplinary discourses and produces an analytical and methodological framework which not only bridges this gap, but which refocuses attention on to the social practices by which mediated discourse forms a primary site within which contemporary social identities are constructed.

The thesis of this book is that mediated discourse is best understood as a kind of social interaction. The problem with taking this view is that such forms of discourse as news discourse (newspaper and television) are most often seen through a false analogy of the

sender–receiver or writer–reader model. It is the goal of this book to argue that a newspaper news story and a television news story function as social interactions on the same principles as business telephone calls and other more frequently studied face-to-face interactions such as conversations. Whether it is a business call or a printed news story, the participants show the same concern with first establishing channel, then relationship, and finally topics. The theoretical framework I put forward argues that whereas in telephone calls the conversational interaction between caller and answerer is primary, the primary social interaction in such mediated forms of discourse as newspapers and television news shows is among journalists and such subsidiary personnel as producers, directors, or printers as the performers who produce a spectacle or posed and scripted display. At the same time I argue that the primary social interactions which involve reading/watching are among readers and viewers who, as observers of this posed spectacle, make a variety of uses of it, ranging from disattention as background or 'wallpaper' to other more focal social activities such as watching or reading and making commentaries. In any event, I argue that the primary social interaction is not between the producers of the spectacles (journalists) and the observers (readers/watchers).

In the framework developed in this book, the social interactions we see in mediated discourse are enacted among performers (journalists in this case, but I would also include academic lecturers and writers, football players, film actors and production crews, or any other producers of mediated discourse) as displays or spectacles for the appropriation of observers. Thus the evening news broadcast, the day's newspaper, a football game, a lecture, or a book, can be analysed as social interactions among the key players (journalists, editors, publishers/owners) and that so-called 'reading' is a kind of spectator social activity, not a primary social interaction between the players and the viewers, or writers and readers. For the 'reader' of such spectacles, the primary social interactions are among those co-present as watchers of the spectacle, not with the writer, news reader, lecturer, or player.

The analytical issue this book uses as its focal point is the social construction of the person in discourse. In business telephone calls, for example, I argue that the crucial distinction between client and colleague must be established as a prerequisite to the introduction of topics. In television and newspaper discourse, producers and editors are constructed as framers of communicative events, the

stories themselves. Presenters and sub-editors are constructed as those with the power to delegate authorship and principalship rights to reporting journalists on specific topics; to put it negatively, reporting journalists are not constructed as equal participants in the discourse with the rights to free introduction of topics. Further, reporters, while they are given identity through bylining and other identifications, are not given voice; that is, they do not speak normally as first persons in news discourse. Newsmakers are constructed with only a limited voice as delegated by reporter, and no authorship rights. On the other hand, they are frequently handed full responsibility or principalship for the words crafted by journalists as their own.

While journalists can be said to have identity and little voice, newsmakers have voice but carefully controlled identity, readers are constructed within this public discourse as little more than the aggregates of social or demographic characteristics of the 'audience'. In the primary social interactions among journalists, the reader or viewer is nearly invisible. On the other hand, this book argues that the reader uses his or her reading as one of many means by which he or she strategizes social presence and social interaction. While journalists carry on their social interaction as a spectacle for the consumption of the reader or viewer, those readers and viewers are using the spectacle as an active component of the construction of their own social environments and social interactions.

Several kinds of research materials are used in this study. The book begins with a close study of business telephone calls to develop the framework from the point of view of more commonly studied two-person social interactions as studied in conversational analysis. The analysis of news discourse which follows is based upon a five-year ethnographic and critical discourse analysis encompassing both local social practices in a specific speech community, Hong Kong, and international journalistic practices. In addition to the ethnographic work in Hong Kong, comparative fieldwork on reading and watching was also conducted in several sites in the US, UK, Australia, Japan, Finland and China. An essential aspect of the argument is that the bridging of social interactional and media studies frameworks requires high levels of methodological interdiscursivity. This book seeks to both use and display that methodological strategy.

The book relies upon close analysis of numerous television news broadcasts and newspaper stories. The initial text corpus had as its

core 28 local and foreign newspapers collected on a single day in Hong Kong in English and Chinese. Television stories were added and were collected as matched sets of both English and Chinese broadcasts as well as the same day's newspapers. In addition to these two matched sets of data, the news text corpus covers 200 newspapers in English, Chinese and several European languages and about 50 television news broadcasts in English, Chinese, Finnish and Brazilian Portuguese, as well as magazines and other periodically published news materials collected over a five-year research period. Most recently, a full documentation of two weeks' news in print and broadcast media, covering the range from newspapers through to infotainment shows, was collected and cross-checked with a readership survey as a way of establishing pathways or networks between the production of the texts of the news and the appropriation of those texts by readers and watchers. This data includes not only Hong Kong-based news sources but also China, Taiwan, BBC, CNN and CBS.

The ethnographic data collected as part of this same research project include interviews, photographs, maps, videotapes and, of course, field notebook entries with a focus on the contexts of the reception of print and televised news discourse in Hong Kong and the other overseas sites. Also included in this ethnographic data are historical, demographic and media consumption data collected through normal library, consumer survey and observational methods.

While the analysis presented here is meant to be applicable throughout contemporary international news discourse, the analysis in this book has been constructed in the cross-cultural and highly interdiscursive environment of Hong Kong for two reasons: to avoid falling into universalist generalizations on the one hand, and, on the other, because Hong Kong is one of the world's most active theatres of news discourse. That a population of just over six million people produces for itself to read over 2.5 million daily local newspapers (as well as importing thousands of foreign papers) indicates an ethnographically rich, diverse, complex and problematical public discourse. These various newspapers break out into approximately 50 dailies, 38 in Chinese and 12 in English with more than 600 other periodicals, mostly in Chinese (Howlett 1997).[1] In addition, newspapers from around the world are sold daily on news-stands.

Positioned as it is in one of the world's most active communicative zones internationally, Hong Kong is particularly well suited

to highlight theoretically problematical counter-examples. This book relies on the cross-checking of English and Chinese, local and foreign news sources as a methodological guard against the problem of single-language or single-community analyses of mediated discourse.

The research has been supported in part by research grants from City University of Hong Kong and by the Public Discourse Research Group of its Department of English. Specifically, these grants include 'Discourse Identities in Hong Kong Public Discourse', 'Changing Patterns of Genres and Identity in Hong Kong Public Discourse', and 'Two Types of Journalistic Objectivity'. I would also like to thank members of the *Lan Kwai Fong*, the Interactional Sociolinguistics, and the Public Discourse discussion groups, all at the Department of English of City University of Hong Kong, for ongoing and stimulating discussion of the ideas presented here. David Li Chor Shing has been especially helpful in collecting and preparing the business telephone calls. In addition I would like to thank Vijay Bhatia, Paul Bruthiaux and Vicki Yung for ongoing discussions, for reading drafts, and for their comments. Janice Ho Wing Yan and Ivy Wong Kwok Ngan, my primary research assistants, were also helpful in both data collection and analysis. Discussions with Chris Candlin have been most useful both while developing the framework presented here and, more specifically, in the process of editing the book for publication. Suzanne Scollon has contributed substantially in providing a continuing critical reflection on this work both at the stage of the construction of the data and in this analysis. While my analysis owes much to the support of these grants and people, none of them is responsible for the problems which remain.

NOTE

1. Exact figures are difficult to obtain. Howlett (1997) is produced by the Hong Kong government Information Services Department. On a single page it gives the figures as '58 daily newspapers, 625 periodicals' and a paragraph later as '38 Chinese-language dailies and 12 English-language dailies' (p. 321). The same book refers the reader to 'http://www.info.gov.hk' which under media gives a graphic which on 8 June 1997 says '50 newspapers' and '659 periodicals' with a line saying *'Click here for a larger image'*. A click produces a larger image and a slightly larger number: '51 newspapers' and 645 periodicals'. As for

circulations, one of the Hong Kong newspapers is, as of writing, under investigation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption for allegedly printing 'up to 23,000 extra copies a day and then selling them directly as waste paper' (*South China Morning Post*, 5 June, 1997, p. 1).

Publisher's Acknowledgements

We have unfortunately been able to trace the copyright holders of the articles by Fanny Wong and Scott McKenzie in *South China Morning Post* 25.2.94 and would appreciate any information which would enable us to do so.

List of Notations Used

(0.5)	The number in parentheses indicates a gap in tenths of a second
:	A colon indicates drawn out sound; the more colons, the more drawn out
–	A dash indicates that the speaker stops in mid-utterance
[ ]	Comments in brackets are for clarification; not recorded speech
(xxx)	Words in parentheses are the transcriber's best guess at doubtful speech
( )	A blank in parentheses represents indecipherable speech
,	A comma indicates self-interrupted speech or a micro-pause
N___	A capital letter followed by a blank underline indicates a person's name
< >	Angled brackets indicates the content of the story
{ }	Brackets indicate the form of identification
IDCE	'Identified; characters in English'
IDNO	'Identified; named by other'
IDNS	'Identified; named by self'

PART I:

THE PRIMACY OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN DISCOURSE

ONE

Mediated action as social practice

TEXT AND CONVERSATIONS, OBJECTS AND EVENTS

A newspaper story is a text. A conversation is an event. In many ways that is the problem of this book. The common language in which we talk about news discourse favours treating it as a body of texts. The language we use to talk about a conversation posits it as an event. Journalists, if asked what they have been doing all afternoon are likely to say that they have been working on a story, they have been working on tonight's broadcast, they have been writing a feature article. In each case the focus is the end product, the text which is ultimately printed or read. On the other hand, if the same journalists had answered that they had been having a conversation, we would most likely think of them as not doing the work of journalism so much as passing the time among friends. The focus is on the social participation, the social interaction. This is how we see conversation. It is the analyst, the ethnomethodologist, who sets about turning the conversation into a text for analysis, not the conversationalists, though as conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists have made abundantly clear, the conversationalists themselves cannot move from utterance to utterance without engaging in a significantly interpretive analysis of the texts as jointly and ongoingly co-constructed among the group of participants.

It is the goal of this book to try to accomplish two kinds of suspension of our ordinary language about talk and text. On the one hand, and in regards to the public discourse of the news, the purpose is to reconstruct our language about it so that we can see it as a process of social interaction in which participants use or appropriate texts and produce texts as almost incidental (from our point of view) tools by which they, journalists, owners of the media and newsmakers alike, engage in the day-to-day social practices

within their communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and in doing which they construct for themselves various discursive identities. On the other hand, and from the point of view of the readers and viewers of those produced texts, the purpose is to reconstruct our language about that reading and watching so that we can come to see the role of those texts as tools by which the readers and watchers engage in the ordinary social practices of life in their communities of practice.

To bring about this reconstituted language it will be necessary to borrow back and forth interdiscursively from these otherwise separated discourses. We will need to come to speak of the newspaper or television broadcast not as texts alone, though we will need to do that as well. We will also need to speak of the social situations in which those texts work as tools for mediated actions (Wertsch 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b). When the television presenter passes the floor to the news reporter and in passing the floor limits topical relevance to a single topic, he or she is engaging in a social interaction that is analytically akin to the conversationalist who says, 'Come on, don't start in on that now'. This, in turn, is akin to what the sub-editor does when he or she places a journalist's story on the page for news of incidental value rather than the front page. In each case a participant in a community of practice has exercised his or her power to delegate voice to another participant in a way that not only specifically limits that voice but, in positioning it, imputes a particular social-discursive identity to the participant. In doing this kind of analysis we need to rely on a literature of interactional sociolinguistics cum conversational analysis cum ethnomethodology.[1]

At the same time, in speaking of what people are doing when they are watching television or reading a newspaper, we need to ask: What kind of social interaction is this? This book argues that both the social interactions in which the texts of news discourse are produced and the social interactions in which those texts are 'read' are primarily social interactions, not cognitive actions nor textual-interpretive actions. That is, when people sit together in the living room watching television (Ang 1996) the primary thing they are doing is sitting together and the television is just one of the mediational means (Wertsch 1991) by which they carry out that mediated action. I will argue further in Chapter 3 that even when they are, in fact, entirely alone watching television or reading a newspaper, that action can be usefully analysed as a social interaction in which

readers and watchers claim rights to non-involvement and other forms of social positioning within their community of practice and in doing so also make serious claims of identity for themselves as participants.

Mediated discourse is constructed in chained or linked mediated actions within communities of practice. As such, mediated discourse is properly studied within a social interactionist and ethnographic framework which elucidates the social practices by which journalists (both television and print), newsmakers, editors, and the owners of the media use texts to construct social relations within their own communities of practice. At the same time, this analytical framework deconstructs the acts of spectatorship of reading and watching as social interactions within communities of practice who appropriate the texts of the media within sites of engagement for their own purposes. A crucial aspect of the mediated actions within both journalistic and spectator communities of practice is the social construction of identity through the use of the texts of the media.

The analytical stance established in this chapter and which will be carried throughout the book is to challenge the sometimes explicit but nearly always implicit sender–receiver model of news discourse. I shall argue that the primary social interactive purposes of journalists are to write for other journalists, to position themselves among those journalists in relationship to the newsmakers on the one hand and the owners of the media on the other – these are the relevant communities of practice within which the texts of the media are constructed. In the same way, the primary social purposes of readers and watchers are better understood if the texts of the media are placed in an instrumental position. That is, I shall argue that readers/viewers exercise agency in appropriating the texts of the media in accomplishing mediated actions within their own communities of practice as significant means by which identity is socially constructed.

MEDIATED DISCOURSE

In what I have said so far I have sketched out the notion of how mediated discourse may be construed as social interaction but in doing so I have not yet clarified how I am using the term 'mediated discourse' except by implication. In current usage there are at least three common ways in which this term might be understood. In the

first of these, one would mean the discourse of 'the media', that is, one would mean the discourse of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals, and perhaps most significantly television and possibly film. Another use of the term which is rapidly increasing is in the phrase 'computer-mediated discourse'. In this case the focus is on communications in which the computer – most often in the form of email or internet communications – is the primary medium of communication between two or more participants. The third common usage is the broadest and comes closest to the use I will make of mediated discourse in this book. In this third usage, the focus is on any mediation involved in carrying on common, everyday discourses. Thus, one would take into consideration written media such as letters, notes, memos, more technological media such as microphones, telephones and also computers, and even languages such as English or Chinese or perhaps modes of communication such as speaking, writing or sign languages.

As I shall use the term, mediated discourse includes virtually all discourse because the focus is upon finding a common basis in social interaction for analysing the ways in which mediational means from languages to microphones, literacy to computers, news stories to telephone calls are appropriated by participants in social scenes in undertaking mediated action. Thus I will want to include the 'media' and, indeed, much of the analysis is based on an analysis of the texts produced by the news media in the most common meaning of that phrase. At the same time, however, I want to argue that the products of those same news media are appropriated for mediated actions which often bear little resemblance to the commonly understood purposes of such texts as news stories. Further, in my analysis of telephone calls I will argue that any instance of communication, that is social interaction, entails the same fundamental concerns for establishing the basis for the social interaction (the channel), establishing the relationships and positioning among the participants, and that the ostensible topics of such social interactions are subsumed to these prior social conditions through the social practices of positioning of participants and framing of events.

TOWARDS A UNIFIED PERSPECTIVE ON PRACTICE

The language which we will need for this analysis includes at least four central phrases: mediated action, sites of engagement,

communities of practice, and mediational means or texts. These phrases, taken together, form a minimal vocabulary for talking about mediated discourse as social interaction. An interactional sociolinguistic view of mediated discourse focuses on action as social practice and then looks to ask what media (mediational means or cultural tools) are used, how those mediational means support or undermine the purposes of the participants within their community of practice (Lave 1988; Lave and Wenger 1991), and how those media bring into the situation the historical, cultural or social practices of the larger society in which these mediated actions (Wertsch 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b) take place.

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b; Gee 1986, 1990), mediated action theory (Wertsch 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b) and situated learning (Lave 1988; Lave and Wenger 1991; Chaikin and Lave 1993) together form the primary analytical framework of this book. While these three analytical stances are largely practised independently of each other, they all co-articulate as a common perspective on a theory of social practice, especially as such a theory would be of use to us in analysing social practices in the production of news texts and in the appropriation of those texts by readers and watchers. All three of these research perspectives reference in part a common core of thought (Vygotsky 1978; Bakhtin 1981a; Vološinov 1986) which clearly originates in, but also departs from, Marxist sociopolitical analysis. More recently, Bourdieu's writings on social practice have significantly developed this framework (1977).

'Critical discourse analysis' is what Fairclough calls his version of this perspective, and his *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) and *Media Discourse* (1995b) are, for our purposes, the fullest and best treatments of it, though the collection of mostly earlier papers (in 1995a) offers important development. Gee uses 'critical literacy' or more often 'sociocultural literacy'. 'Mediated action' is what Wertsch calls his version. His *Voices of the Mind* (1991) is his most representative work in which he spells out the main points and the arguments in way of support. On the whole, Wertsch's perspective is spelled out in specific domains – largely ones having to do with public schooling in the US. 'Situated learning' is what Lave and Wenger call their version of this perspective in the book of the same title (1991).

All of these derive their work from a point in the Soviet Union – the 1920s – in which an attempt was made to develop a full-blown

social/cultural/historical view of the relationship between society and the person and the role of language in this mediation. In the case of Fairclough, his primary focus is upon discourse and how it is constructive of, and constructed by, social practice. While Fairclough is careful to include discussion of the social construction of the person and gives much attention to identities and relations (1995b), his interest is primarily in the ways in which social practice is constituted by text and is constitutive of text. Of course his work has developed in tandem with Halliday's systemic–functional perspective (1978, 1985, 1989).

Wertsch's primary interest is in a theory of the person. As a psychologist his concern is largely to contest the hegemonic position of cognition, voluntarism, and individualism in American psychology. He is particularly concerned with overcoming the individualist–collectivist antinomy in the perennial argument between psychologists and sociologists. His solution is to select mediated action as the focus of study. Mediated action is the moment at which social practice is, in fact, practice (people doing things) and not an abstraction or a reification. In his view there is virtually no action which is not mediated, and the mediation is the means by which agents incorporate social practice (culture, history) into their activities. The focus is not on texts or social practice, but on how those are appropriated in action.

Lave is an anthropologist and her primary concern is with neither society on the whole nor with the individual in particular, but with the social groupings (communities of practice) which form the social matrix of practice within which what Wertsch calls mediated action takes place. Fairclough places texts within discursive practices and those in turn within social practices [social practice (discursive practice {text})]. Wertsch would have mediated action contextualized within social practices [social practice (mediated action)], in which Fairclough's 'texts' would be incorporated as the 'media' of the action. Lave would contextualize communities of practice within broader social groups and focus on participation as a form of learning [social groups (community of practice {participation/learning})]. In the reading of these three perspectives as I shall use them, the differences among them is largely in focus and attention. Fairclough uses text as the organizing principle, Wertsch uses the person, Lave uses the community of practice. The focus of this book shifts among persons, communities of practice, social practices, and the analysis of texts. Thus it relies on a co-articulation of

the perspectives of critical discourse analysis, situated learning, and mediated action.

As I read these, each of them has a means of incorporating the language of the other. Where Fairclough generally uses *intertextuality*[2] (from Kristeva 1986a, 1986b, who got it from Bakhtin 1981a and other texts), Wertsch and Lave use *dialogicality* (from Bahktin 1981a and other texts; they also sometimes use *heteroglossia* in various translations). None of these use or acknowledge Uspensky's (1973) *polyvocality* but it should be recalled that Goffman (1974) cites Uspensky as a major source (and therefore Bakhtin) in his formulation of *Frame Analysis* which is probably the first entry of *intertextuality, dialogicality, polyvocality* into American sociological usage. Fairclough does cite Goffman's *Frame Analysis*, however, as relating to his *intertextuality*, apparently without awareness of Goffman's citation of Uspensky.

Wertsch's 'cultural tools' ('mediational means') is roughly Fairclough's 'texts'. Lave seems quiet on the matter of the discursive aspects of communities of practice. I say 'roughly' because Fairclough's analysis is much more strongly focused on language than either Lave's or Wertsch's (actual instances of language – language as language in use such as genres or types of discourse rather than language as 'English', 'Chinese').

Of the three perspectives, Lave's says least about text or mediational means, most about learning, identity, and the idea of communities of practice. Identity is theorized as participation in communities of practice. These latter are constructed in a dialectic with identity. Learning is seen as inseparable from identity, both of which are integral aspects of participation. On this latter issue, all participation in communities of practice is understood as peripheral. That is, Lave is clear about not allowing the concept of communities of practice to become reified entities, but flexible constructs-in-situations. It is not entirely clear to what extent Lave's communities of practice should be understood as Fairclough's discursive formations (Foucault 1973a, 1973b, 1977) but certainly Lave's understanding of communities of practice is entirely consonant with Fairclough's concerns with *interdiscursivity*. That is, there is a tension and contestation both within and between such changing communities or discourses. Wertsch says relatively little about communities or discourses.

Each of these frameworks addresses issues which, for our purposes, are insufficiently treated in the available work of the others.

It seems that the areas least developed by all, but in no way incompatible with these frameworks, are the role of 'the media' (in this case I mean the broadcast and print mass communication media as social institutions), non-verbal communication, other non-linguistic semiotic codes, technologies of production and reception (cameras, word processors, television sets, pagers, prompters – these are often neglected as theory and observation keeps slipping upwards into metaphorized 'tools' and 'technologies' such as language, interviews, and the like). I shall argue, however, that taken together the key concepts of *mediated action, sites of engagement, communities of practice,* and *mediational means* or texts (taken in that sense) form a useful framework for understanding mediated discourse as social interaction.

The following, then, is an overview of the key issues upon which these concepts place the focus as well as areas in which it is crucial to problematize the concepts.

Mediated action

As proposed by Wertsch (1991), the concept of mediated action places the primary focus on actions, not on the reifications of actions such as texts on the one hand or 'acts' on the other. Wertsch's concern is with undercutting what he calls the individual-collectivist antinomy. Rather than entering into the argument about whether actions are primarily based in individual agency and cognition or social determination, Wertsch argues that mediated action is the point at which culture, society, or in our case the media enter into human action. Mediated action is the site in which social and discursive practice are instantiated as actions of humans; at the same time it is the site in which individual humans act upon society and its discursive practices. In Wertsch's view, virtually all human actions are mediated. As he points out, except for reflex responses, it would be hard to argue that any human actions do not call upon language and prior social learning as mediational means.

As useful as the concept of mediated action is to this analysis, it is crucial to be alert to ways in which the concept might be reinterpreted within a less productive reified framework, not unlike the way in which speech-act theory drifted over time from a focus on speech as action into a concern with classification of speech acts, a specification of their contexts, an analysis of potential felicity

conditions and possible but indeterminate meanings (Mey 1993). While it is useful to ask what sort of mediated action is going on in any particular situation, it drifts towards reification to begin to ask how many mediated actions and of what kinds and in whose interpretation. The concept, to remain useful, must always remain problematized. It is crucial to test against participants' claims and contestations explicit and implicit about 'what's going on here?' As I shall use the concept here, mediated action as a unit of analysis is at best a point of view, however temporary, upon discourse as the social enactment of social practice.

Sites of engagement

While the concept of the site of engagement will not be taken up in any detail until Chapter 4, here it is useful, perhaps, to adumbrate that discussion. The concept was introduced elsewhere (R. Scollon 1997a) to focus attention to the windows within which texts are available for appropriation (reading, watching, interpretation) and use (writing, production, etc.) in undertaking mediated actions. Sites of engagement are the windows which are defined by a wide variety of social practices. A family may sit together eating dinner while the television is on. Social practices concerning who may introduce topics, for example, may make the television programme currently unavailable for comment or collaborative viewing much in the same way that a person at the table may be constrained from introducing a topic because of age, gender, or various other currently obtaining social practices. The concept of the site of engagement encourages the analyst to understand that in such a situation, the television broadcast is in effect 'wallpaper' – a present, perceptible aspect of situational contextual design, but not currently available for appropriation as a mediational tool within the ongoing situation. In this sense, the site of engagement is not just the neutral context, setting or scene within which mediated actions take place. The site of engagement is the window opened through the intersection of social practices in which participants may appropriate a text for mediated action.

While such sites of engagement may only be momentarily opened, much like topics in a conversation, the intervals between such sites of engagement may be brief or very long. In a conversation in which one participant brings up a topic and another responds, the site

of engagement of that particular text and the time lapse between appropriation (as reception) and use (in mediated action) may be a matter of micro-seconds. On the other hand, the site of engagement within which I see (appropriate the text of) a film and the site of engagement in which I use it in another mediated action such as mentioning it to a friend in conversation may be separated by an interval of decades or more.

If the concept has value, it is to focus on real-time processes and practices and to avoid reification or the study of reified entities not otherwise available to participants. As I will argue in Chapter 4, a handbill passed out on a busy pedestrian thoroughfare is available for appropriation only for the few moments between when the person receives it and then decides to discard it in the nearest rubbish container. The programme on television is only available for appropriation during the moments when other conversationalists allow a topical window to open; the newspaper I am trying to read is only open to appropriation after I have selected my seat on the train, adjusted myself and my belongings, folded it into convenient size and shape, and satisfied myself that I am free from other social obligations such as conversation with the person sitting next to me.

While I will argue in Chapter 4 that the idea of the site of engagement is useful to the study of mediated discourse to focus our attention on just those moments when texts are actually in use, not just passively present in the environment, the idea must remain problematized by asking if there are any regularly occurring or universal social practices which govern sites of engagement. One imagines that the search for universal sets of social practices is doomed to overgeneralization and unuseful abstraction. On the other hand, if in any situation the social practices determining such sites of engagement are specific, concrete to that situation, and multiple, as I shall argue, then one must ask: How many social practices are the minimum to define a site of engagement? Or, must all participants be engaged in the same way? Finally, is there a critical difference between such sites of engagement and Candlin's (1987) 'moments of conflict' in which the contradictions between conflicting discourses present in a particular situation must be crucially resolved? Of course, I will argue that it is this discussion which is of value in coming to understand mediated discourse as social interaction. It is the negotiation of participants in a community of practice over the positioning of themselves and the other participants which is the key issue and the social practices governing sites of

engagement are among the mediational means by which participants may undertake the mediated actions to position their own identities.

Communities of practice

As Lave and Wenger (1991) have defined communities of practice, the focus is on learning and identity. In their view, any learning by definition entails change of identity. At a minimum, one moves from claiming the identity of novice towards claiming the identity of expert within a community of practice, from newcomer to old-timer. In their view, participation in a community of practice entails learning as any actions fundamentally alter one's position in relation to others within the community. Thus, all participation is learning and entails change of identity. A key point in their analysis is that community of practice as an analytical concept must maintain a focus upon change, negotiation, differences in participation statuses, and claims, imputations, legitimations, and contestations of identity.

The idea of a community of practice as put forward by Lave and Wenger is broader than Goffman's 'with' (1963, 1971) which is understood to be keyed to the face-to-face social encounter. A community of practice is a group of people who over a period of time share in some set of social practices geared towards some common purpose. While each aspect might be problematical, there seems to be an understanding that such a group would largely be known to each other face-to-face (though telecommunications open up for analysis communities of practice with no face-to-face contact) through regular, patterned forms of social interaction, and that such a community of practice would develop a history over time of novices entering, moving through into expertise, and retirement from the community. In any event, it is crucial to note that a community of practice is not an abstract category such as a social group or social class.

While this idea is important in the analysis in the following chapters, problems remain. When the focus is on the concept of the community of practice, one can simplistically and for the sake of argument slip into thinking of communities of practice as totalizing entities. In fact, everyone is always multiply membered in various communities of practice. A journalist is a member of some practising group of journalists, perhaps those who work for the same

newspaper or television station. At the same time, this journalist may be a member of a family, a member of a fencing club, and a fiction writer who meets with other writing friends from time to time to talk about their work. A tailor's apprentice may be a novice within his employer's shop and at the same time may be the captain of their city league football team in which his employer is a player. Thus the two people may position themselves rather differently even within the same conversation depending on whether the topic is stitching or scoring goals.

Again, what is useful about this concept is not trying to establish who is a member of what community of practice at any particular moment; it is a matter of focusing attention on relationships among learning, participation, identity, and action as ongoing positionings carried through mediated actions in discourse.

Texts as mediational means

Texts are the stuff of discourse analysis, of course, as they are the stuff of media analysis as well. With the ever closer convergence of telephone, newspaper and television in the internet we seem to be coming nearer to Borges's Library of Babel with all of the possible texts in all of the possible languages.[3] Perhaps it is an occupational hazard for discourse analysts, media analysts and even interactional sociolinguists that analysis always returns to texts. I say occupational hazard because, while I will try to exemplify below that it is always essential to give close attention to the texts in the discourses we study, the hazard is that we will slip over into thinking that the analysis of the text is all the work there is to be done. From the point of view I am developing here, what is crucial is to see texts as mediational means – the tools by which people undertake mediated action. The purpose is not the production of the text but the production of the action which the text makes possible. While this may seem a fine distinction, it is a crucial one for my argument.

In a mediational view of action, texts are cultural tools or mediational means (Wertsch 1991). This is a perspective which derives, as I have suggested above, from the work of Vygotsky, Vološinov, Medvyedev and Bakhtin (1981a, 1981b, 1986, 1990, 1993). By taking this perspective on texts it is possible, on the one hand, to focus our attention to just those aspects of texts which are of relevance to the

actions taken by participants in any particular situation. At the same time, it is possible to focus our attention not on the texts themselves, but on the actions being taken and to see how the texts become the means by which sociocultural practice is interpolated into human action.

Key issues concerning texts as mediational means revolve around the Bakhtinian notion that polyvocality is the nature of all human utterance. Communication in this sense must make use of the language, the texts, of others and because of that, those other voices provide both amplification and limitations of our own voices. A text which is appropriated for use in mediated action brings with it the conventionalizations of the social practices of its history of use. We say not only what we want to say but also what the text must inevitably say for us. At the same time, our use of texts in mediated actions changes those texts and in turn alters the discursive practices. A parent who takes up the jargon of his or her teenage son is almost certain to place that jargon into brackets for the son who then avoids using those same words.

The major problem we encounter here is that this polyvocality or dialogicality of all texts means that all texts are always intertextual and interdiscursive. That is, all texts borrow their language from other texts (intertextuality) and all genres borrow from other genres (interdiscursivity). To put it negatively, there are no 'pure' or 'original' texts or genres.

This produces a level of indeterminancy into any analysis of the texts of mediated action. While it is theoretically given that the utterer is not the original producer of a text, at the same time, to put it more broadly, it is always ultimately undeterminable who or what discourse is the original voice we are hearing. The crucial question is to ask how do participants in a community of practice use this indeterminacy in positioning themselves and others, to pull discursive practice into their actions to position selves and others.

NEWS PRESENTATION AND WATCHING AS SOCIAL INTERACTION

Two fields of study, social interaction and media studies, have remained for some years at a considerable distance from each other. For example, studies of social interaction such as those of Goffman

(1959, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1971, 1974), while they made frequent use of materials collected from the press, for example, did not analyse them as instances of mediated communication as such, but only as examples of other social issues. Only with his *Gender Advertisements* (1979) and the article on Radio Talk (in 1981) did Goffman address issues of mediated communication directly. On the other side of the gulf, it is only relatively recently that media researchers have begun to look at the social interactions surrounding the use of media in society. A number of studies, for example, have argued that the people in the news are ideologically constructed through processes of naming, attribution and citation (Caldas-Coulthard 1993, 1994; Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 1996; R. Scollon in press). Such text-orientated studies have contributed to our understanding of the ways in which language may be used to reproduce the ideological structures of the society within which it is embedded (Fairclough 1989, 1995a, 1995b). There is a growing acknowledgement that whether the analysis is of printed or televised news, it must take into account the interpretive processes of the readers or consumers of news discourse (Morley 1980, 1990; Morley and Silverstone 1991; Moores 1993). These critiques have turned to a focus on the active work of consumers in producing the meanings of the texts encountered in print and on television.

At about the same time that Goffman was coming to take an interest in mediated communication, media researchers began to take an interest in the social constitution of media audiences. Many of them (Moores 1993) have come to analyse media audiences ethnographically in keeping with contemporary interpretive theories of media reception. While this shift in focus to the responses of consumers represents a considerable enrichment of our understanding of the processes by which news stories become meaningful in society, they do not resolve one crucial issue: What sort of social interaction is news discourse?

In this book I try to integrate work from both ends of this continuum of approaches to highlight areas of overlapping discourse in which one may observe processes of social interaction being conducted as displays for other observers in social interactions of higher complexity. Thus, I will argue that there is a class of social interactions which I call 'watches' in which one set of participants, the spectacle, takes on the obligation to display their behaviour in front of other participants, the watchers. Such 'watches' share many of the characteristics of what Goffman (1981) calls 'podium events';

that is, for example, between the spectacle and watchers there is a highly restrictive set of conventions prohibiting cross-over discourse between them. The audience may laugh, clap, shout, and in other ways show social and rhythmic entrainment with the activities of the spectacle, but may not directly join in the production of the spectacle. The spectacle may display appreciation of the crowd noises, but not directly respond to members of the audience. The questions I ask are: What is the social interaction here and how are social roles constructed in the forms of interaction present?

While the root metaphor of the sender–receiver conduit (Reddy 1979) in communication has perhaps weakened through more dialogic conceptions of language and communication (Bakhtin 1981a, 1981b, 1986, 1990, 1993), most studies of television discourse remain grounded in the notion that a news broadcast is a social interaction in which some sort of message is sent – 'constituted' would be a word more consistent with present usage – from the television set and received on the other end – here the preferred word might be 'interpreted'. That is, studies of television discourse seem still quite securely rooted in the notion that it is a social interaction between the producers of mass communication and the consumers. Analyses of newspaper discourse remain even more solidly rooted in the concept of the sender–receiver, however interpretive the activities of that reader are now conceived as being (Zhu et al. in press).

Much has been said to support the sender–receiver view, of course, but the research which I report here will argue that this view of mediated discourse may well disguise other significant aspects of the social interactions going on in the same situations. My interest is in the social construction of the identities we recognize as persons, in this case the persons we call journalists on the one hand, the reader/watchers on the other. Following upon Goffman's analysis, I argue that these persons are constructed in ongoing social interactions in which identities are claimed or projected upon others and, in turn, those identities are ratified by reciprocal claims and legitimations. While these claims, counter-claims, and ratifications are familiar enough to us in studies of face-to-face interaction, I believe it is important to see that they are also operative in such mediated forms of discourse as the ordinary television news broadcast and the daily newspaper.

In a study of ordinary phototaking (R. Scollon 1996a and Chapter 4), I have argued that there is a kind of social interaction which I call a 'watch' by analogy with Goffman's 'with' (1963, 1971), in

which the two sides to the interaction polarize into two strictly constrained interacting sets, a spectacle and the watchers. The spectacle (the poser in the photograph, the lecturer, football players, and television news presenters) takes on the social obligations of adopting conventional poses, of restricting their direct attention to the matters of the pose (or the game, etc.), and give up social rights to symmetrical access to the watchers; that is, the spectacle gives up the right to call for feedback and accepts the obligation to perform in a state of *as-if* conventionalized poses.[4]

Watchers, on the other hand, take on the asymmetrical social rights to relatively unlimited observation including commentary without fear of recrimination, to movement, and to dropping in and out of observation. The primary social interactions among watchers become the 'withs' with which they are co-present and the watching social interaction becomes secondary in the same way that primary social interactions among the spectacle – ball players, for example – rarely are broken through by interactions with the watchers. In fact where they are, as in the case where a football player leaps into the stands or a fan leaps on to the field, these breaks in the conventional barrier to cross-over interaction are highly sanctioned.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

While the central conceptual theme of the book is that mediated discourse is best understood as social interaction, an equally central issue is methodological. How does the analyst develop an approach to the news media or other forms of mediated discourse which is founded in ethnography on the one hand and which can link social practice and discourse theory to the social interactionist literature on the other? Thus this second methodological theme is taken up in the three chapters of Part II.

In Chapter 2 the central theme of the book is presented. This chapter argues that mediated discourse is most usefully analysed as linked mediated actions in which the texts of the media are appropriated within communities of practice. This analytical stance extends the scope of interactional sociolinguistic analysis from face-to-face interaction to interactions mediated by texts. In order to clarify the social practices by which events, participation structures

and topics are jointly negotiated and constructed in direct social interaction, the book uses the example of business telephone calls. Telephone are intermediate between face-to-face interaction and the interactively distanced productions of television and print media. While there is a technological medium which intervenes between the primary participants, the social interaction calls upon the mutually co-constructive practices of face-to-face communication.

Using the telephone interaction as the representative anecdote (Burke 1945), the book is able to show that there is a nested set of social practices such that primary real-time attention is given to the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the broadest generic frame, what is often called the 'channel'. Within that constraint, attention is given over to establishing and maintaining a state of social interaction among the participants. Only within the technologically sustained channel and the mutually negotiated set of discourse identities do the participants turn to the establishment of the topic at hand for discussion. This chapter summarizes these social practices with three nested Maxims of Stance for social interaction:

1. Attend to the channel.
2. When the channel is established, attend to the relationships and identities.
3. When identities are established, attend to topics.

This analytical frame is then used in subsequent chapters to argue that mediated discourse works within the same social practices for the establishment of communicative events, the negotiations of identity, and, finally, the discussion of topics.

These Maxims of Stance, of course, parallel Fairclough's (1995b) concern with *representation, identities and relations*. Both my treatment here and that of Fairclough make the point that in any instance of discourse all of these elements are interacting as a means of producing identities and relations through representation in the text. Fairclough's primary focus, however, is upon 'how texts are designed' (p. 206) with a secondary focus on relations and identities, especially those *between* 'media personnel (journalists, presenters) and audiences/readerships', '"others" (e.g. experts, politicians) and audiences/readerships', and 'media personnel and "others"' (p. 203). This interest cuts across my primary focus on the relations and identities *among* media personnel in the production of text on the one hand and *among* media audiences/readerships on the other