Discourse and social change

Preface

The idea of writing this book came from discussions with a number of colleagues at Lancaster University about discourse analysis as a method in social research, in particular sociologists Paul Bagguley, Scott Lash and Celia Lury, Mick Dillon of the Politics Department, and Susan Condor of the Psychology Department. I have also benefited from the encouragement and enthusiasm of colleagues and students in Linguistics, especially Romy Clark, Roz Ivanic, Hilary Janks, Stef Slembrouk, and Mary Talbot. Mary Talbot also provided the conversational narrative sample in chapter 5. I am grateful to Gunther Kress and John Thompson for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft. Last but by no means least, I have had invaluable support and tolerance during the writing process from Vonny, Simon and Matthew.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Today individuals working in a variety of disciplines are coming to recognize the ways in which changes in language use are linked to wider social and cultural processes, and hence are coming to appreciate the importance of using language analysis as a method for studying social change. But there does not yet exist a method of language analysis which is both theoretically adequate and practically usable. My main objective in this book, therefore, is to develop an approach to language analysis which can contribute to filling this gap – an approach which will be particularly useful for investigating change in language, and will be usable in studies of social and cultural change.

To achieve this, it is necessary to draw together methods for analysing language developed within linguistics and language studies, and social and political thought relevant to developing an adequate social theory of language. Among the former, I include work within various branches of linguistics (vocabulary, semantics, grammar), pragmatics, and above all the 'discourse analysis' that has been developed recently mainly by linguists (the various senses of 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' are discussed shortly); and I include among the latter the work of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens (see references). Such a synthesis is long overdue, but there are various factors which have militated against it being satisfactorily achieved so far. One is the isolation of language studies from other social sciences, and the domination of linguistics by formalistic and cognitive paradigms. Another is the

traditional lack of interest in language on the part of other social sciences, and a tendency to see language as transparent: while linguistic data such as interviews are widely used, there has been a tendency to believe that the social content of such data can be read off without attention to the language itself. These positions and attitudes are now changing. Boundaries between social sciences are weakening, and a greater diversity of theory and practice is developing within disciplines. And these changes have been accompanied by a 'linguistic turn' in social theory, which has resulted in language being accorded a more central role within social phenomena.

Previous attempts at synthesizing language studies and social theory have thus had limited success. For example, a group of linguists in Britain in the 1970s developed a 'critical linguistics' by combining the theories and methods of text analysis of 'systemic linguistics' (Halliday 1978) with theories of ideology. Somewhat earlier in France, Michel Pêcheux and his associates began to develop an approach to discourse analysis which drew especially upon work by the linguist Zellig Harris, and Althusser's reworking of a Marxist theory of ideology. Both of these attempts suffer from an imbalance between the social and linguistic elements of the synthesis, though they have complementary strengths and weaknesses: in the former, the linguistic analysis and the treatment of language texts is well developed, but there is little social theory and the concepts of 'ideology' and 'power' are used with little discussion or explanation, whereas in Pêcheux's work the social theory is more sophisticated but linguistic analysis is treated in very narrow, semantic terms. Moreover, both attempts are based upon a static view of power relations, with an over-emphasis upon how the ideological shaping of language texts contributes to reproducing existing power relations. Little attention is paid to struggle and transformation in power relations and the role of language therein. There is similar emphasis upon the description of texts as finished products, and little attention to processes of text production and interpretation, or the tensions that characterize these processes. As a consequence, these attempts at synthesis are not suitable for investigating language dynamically, within processes of social and cultural change. (See chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of these approaches, and some reference to more recent attempts to improve and develop them.)

The synthesis that I shall attempt in this book will, like Pêcheux's, centre around 'discourse analysis' and the concept of 'discourse'. Discourse is a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints (see van Dijk 1985; McDonell 1986, for some of the range). In linguistics, 'discourse' is sometimes used to refer to extended samples of spoken dialogue, in contrast with written 'texts'. Text analysis' and 'discourse analysis' in this sense do not share the traditional limitation of linguistic analysis to sentences or smaller grammatical units; instead, they focus upon higher-level organizational properties of dialogue (e.g. turn-taking, or the structure of conversational openings and closings) or of written texts (e.g. the structure of a crime report in a newspaper). More commonly, however, 'discourse' is used in linguistics to refer to extended samples of either spoken or written language. In addition to preserving the emphasis upon higher-level organizational features, this sense of 'discourse' emphasizes interaction between speaker and addressee or between writer and reader, and therefore processes of producing and interpreting speech and writing, as well as the situational context of language use. 'Text' is regarded here as one dimension of discourse: the written or spoken 'product' of the process of text production. (On this 'text-and-interaction' view of discourse, see Widdowson 1979.) Finally, 'discourse' is also used for different types of language used in different sorts of social situation (e.g. 'newspaper discourse', 'advertising discourse', 'classroom discourse', 'the discourse of medical consultations').

On the other hand, 'discourse' is widely used in social theory and analysis, for example in the work of Michel Foucault, to refer to different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. Thus the discourse of 'medical science' is currently the dominant one in the practice of health care, though it contrasts with various wholistic 'alternative' discourses (e.g. those of homeopathy and acupuncture) as well as popular 'folk' discourses. Discourses in this sense are manifested in particular ways of using language and other symbolic forms such as visual images (see Thompson 1990). Discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute' them; different discourses constitute key entities (be they 'mental illness', 'citizenship' or 'literacy') in different ways, and position

people in different ways as social subjects (e.g. as doctors or patients), and it is these social effects of discourse that are focused upon in discourse analysis. Another important focus is upon historical change: how different discourses combine under particular social conditions to produce a new, complex discourse. A contemporary example is the social construction of the AIDS disease, in which various discourses (e.g. discourses of venereology, of cultural 'invasion' by 'aliens', of pollution) are combined to constitute a new discourse of AIDS. This more social-theoretical sense of discourse will be discussed further in chapter 2.

My attempt at drawing together language analysis and social theory centres upon a combination of this more social-theoretical sense of 'discourse' with the 'text-and-interaction' sense in linguistically-oriented discourse analysis. This concept of discourse and discourse analysis is three-dimensional. Any discursive 'event' (i.e. any instance of discourse) is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. The 'text' dimension attends to language analysis of texts. The 'discursive practice' dimension, like 'interaction' in the 'text-and-interaction' view of discourse, specifies the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation, for example which types of discourse (including 'discourses' in the more social-theoretical sense) are drawn upon and how they are combined. The 'social practice' dimension attends to issues of concern in social analysis such as the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event and how that shapes the nature of the discursive practice, and the constitutive/ constructive effects of discourse referred to above.

I should add that 'text' is used in this book in a sense which is quite familiar in linguistics but not elsewhere, to refer to any product whether written or spoken, so that the transcript of an interview or a conversation, for example, would be called a 'text'. The emphasis in this book is upon language and therefore linguistic texts, but it is quite appropriate to extend the notion of discourse to cover other symbolic forms such as visual images, and texts which are combinations of words and images, for example in advertising (see Hodge and Kress 1988). I shall use the term 'discourse' without an article to refer to language use seen in the above three-dimensional way (e.g. 'the positioning of social subjects is achieved in discourse'), and I shall also refer to 'dis-

course types' which are drawn upon when people engage in discourse, meaning conventions such as genres and styles. In chapter 4 I shall also begin using the term 'discourse' with an article ('a discourse', 'discourses', 'the discourse of biology') in something like the social-theoretical sense for a particular class of discourse types or conventions. I shall also refer to the 'discourse practices' of particular institutions, organizations or societies (in contrast to 'discursive practice' as one analytically distinguishable dimension of discourse).

The case for the multidimensional concept of discourse and discourse analysis sketched out above is made in chapters 1–3. Chapter 1 is a survey of approaches to discourse analysis which are linguistically-oriented, that is, they focus upon texts and text analysis. I shall argue that these approaches give insufficient attention to important social aspects of discourse, for which one needs to draw upon social theory. Chapter 2 reviews such social perspectives upon discourse in the work of Michel Foucault, a social theorist who has been a major influence in the development of discourse analysis as a form of social analysis. The chapter goes on to argue that greater attention to texts and language analysis would increase the value of discourse analysis as a method in social research. Chapter 3 then presents my multidimensional approach as a synthesis of socially- and linguistically-oriented views of discourse, moving towards what I call a 'social theory of discourse'. This approach is elaborated and applied to various sorts of discourse in later chapters of the book.

I suggested at the beginning of this introduction that changes in language use are an important part of wider social and cultural changes. This is increasingly the case, but the claim needs more explanation and justification. Claims about the social importance of language are not new. Social theory in recent decades has given language a more central place in social life (see Thompson 1984). Firstly, within Marxist theory, Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1971) have stressed the significance of ideology for modern social reproduction, and others such as Pêcheux (1982) have identified discourse as the pre-eminent linguistic material form of ideology (see pp. 30–5 below; by 'reproduction' I mean the mechanisms through which societies sustain their social structures and social relations over time). Secondly, Foucault (1979) has highlighted the importance of technologies in modern forms of

power, and it is clear that these are centrally instantiated in language (see pp. 51–4 below). Thirdly, Habermas (1984) has focused upon the colonization of the 'lifeworld' by the 'systems' of the economy and the state, which he sees in terms of a displacement of 'communicative' uses of language – oriented to producing understanding – by 'strategic' uses of language – oriented to success, to getting people to do things. The elevation of language and discourse within the social sphere is variously reflected in work on, for example, gender relations (Spender 1980) or the media (van Dijk 1985b) which focuses upon language, and sociological research which takes conversation as its data (Atkinson and Heritage 1984).

What is open to question is whether such theory and research recognizes an importance that language has always had in social life but which has previously not been sufficiently acknowledged, or actually reflects an increase in the social importance of language. Although both may be true, I believe that there has been a significant shift in the social functioning of language, a shift reflected in the salience of language in the major social changes which have been taking place over the last few decades. Many of these social changes do not just involve language, but are constituted to a significant extent by changes in language practices; and it is perhaps one indication of the growing importance of language in social and cultural change that attempts to engineer the direction of change increasingly include attempts to change language practices. Let me give some examples.

Firstly, in many countries there has recently been an upsurge in the extension of the market to new areas of social life: sectors such as education, health care and the arts have been required to restructure and reconceptualize their activities as the production and marketing of commodities for consumers (Urry 1987). These changes have profoundly affected the activities, social relations, and social and professional identities of people working in such sectors. A major part of their impact comprises changes in discourse practices, that is, changes in language. In education, for example, people find themselves under pressure to engage in new activities which are largely defined by new discourse practices (such as marketing), and to adopt new discourse practices within existing activities (such as teaching). This includes 'rewordings' of

activities and relationships, for example rewording learners as 'consumers' or 'clients', courses as 'packages' or 'products'. It also includes a more subtle restructuring of the discourse practices of education – the types of discourse (genres, styles, etc.) which are used in it – and a 'colonization' of education by types of discourse from outside, including those of advertising, management, and counselling.

Again, industry is moving towards what is being called 'post-Fordist' production (Bagguley and Lash 1988; Bagguley 1990), in which workers no longer function as individuals performing repetitive routines within an invariant production process, but as teams in a flexible relation to a fast-changing process. Moreover, traditional employee–firm relations have been seen by managements as dysfunctional in this context; they have therefore attempted to transform workplace culture, for example by setting up institutions which place employees in a more participatory relation with management, such as 'quality circles'. To describe these changes as 'cultural' is not just rhetoric: the aim is new cultural values, workers who are 'enterprising', self-motivating and, as Rose (MS) has put it, 'self-steering'. These changes in organization and culture are to a significant extent changes in discourse practices. Language use is assuming greater importance as a means of production and social control in the workplace. More specifically, workers are now being expected to engage in face-to-face and group interaction as speakers and listeners. Almost all job descriptions in white-collar work, even at the lowest levels, now stress communication skills. One result is that people's social identities as workers are coming to be defined in terms that have traditionally been seen not as occupational, but as belonging to the sphere of private life. One striking feature of changes of this sort is that they are transnational. New styles of management and devices such as 'quality circles' are imported from more economically successful countries like Japan, so that changes in the discourse practices of workplaces come to have a partly international character. The new global order of discourse is thus characterized by widespread tensions between increasingly international imported practices and local traditions.

There are many other examples of change: changes in relations between doctors and patients, between politicians and the public,

between women and men in workplaces and in the family, all of which are partly constituted by new discourse practices. Moreover, the increasing salience of discourse in social transformations is being matched as I suggested above by a concern to control discourse: to bring about changes in discourse practices as part of the engineering of social and cultural change. We are witnessing a 'technologization of discourse' (Fairclough 1990b), in which discursive technologies as a type of 'technologies of government' (Rose and Miller 1989) are being systematically applied in a variety of organizations by professional technologists who research, redesign, and provide training in discourse practices. Social psychologists involved in 'skills training' were an early example of this development (see Argyle 1978). Discursive technologies such as interviewing or counselling are coming to be treated as context-free techniques or skills which can be applied in various different domains. And institutional discourse practices are being widely subjected to simulation: in particular, conversational discourse practices which traditionally belong in the private sphere are being systematically simulated within organizations. (For further discussion of discourse technologization see pp. 215–18 below.)

My objective, then, is to develop an approach to discourse analysis which could be used as one method amongst others for investigating social changes such as those referred to above. For a method of discourse analysis to be useful in such contexts, it would need to fulfil a number of minimum conditions. I shall comment on four of these, and in the process elaborate a little on the sketch of my approach that I gave earlier. Firstly, it would need to be a method for multidimensional analysis. My three-dimensional approach enables relationships between discursive and social change to be assessed, and detailed properties of texts to be related systematically to social properties of discursive events as instances of social practice.

Secondly, it would need to be a method for multifunctional analysis. Changing discourse practices contribute to change in knowledge (including beliefs and common sense), social relations, and social identities; and one needs a conception of discourse and a method of analysis which attends to the interplay of these three. A good starting point is a systemic theory of language (Halliday 1978) which sees language as multifunctional, and sees texts as

simultaneously representing reality, enacting social relations, and establishing identities. This theory of language can fruitfully be combined with the emphasis upon socially constructive properties of discourse in social-theoretical approaches to discourse such as Foucault's.

Thirdly, it would need to be a method for historical analysis. Discourse analysis should focus upon structuring or 'articulatory' processes in the construction of texts, and in the longer-term constitution of 'orders of discourse' (that is, total configurations of discursive practices in particular institutions, or indeed in a whole society). On the level of texts, I see these processes in terms of 'intertextuality' (see pp. 84–5 and chapter 4 below): texts are constructed through other texts being articulated in particular ways, ways which depend upon and change with social circumstances. On the level of orders of discourse, relationships among and boundaries between discourse practices in an institution or the wider society are progressively shifted in ways which accord with directions of social change.

Fourthly, it would need to be a critical method. Relationships between discursive, social and cultural change are typically not transparent for the people involved. Nor is technologization of discourse. 'Critical' implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change. In this connection, it is important to avoid an image of discursive change as a unilinear, top-down process: there is struggle over the structuring of texts and orders of discourse, and people may resist or appropriate changes coming from above, as well as merely go along with them (see pp. 68–70 and chapter 7 below).

To conclude this introduction, I shall give a brief preview of the treatment of discursive change in chapters 3–7. Chapter 3 presents my synthesis of socially and linguistically-oriented views of discourse. My account of analysis in the dimension of discursive practice centres upon the concept of intertextuality. My account of analysis in the dimension of social practice, however, centres upon the concepts of ideology and especially hegemony, in the sense of a mode of domination which is based upon alliances, the incorporation of subordinate groups, and the generation of consent. Hegemonies within particular organizations

and institutions and at a societal level are produced, reproduced, contested and transformed in discourse. Moreover, the structuring of discourse practices in particular ways within orders of discourse can be seen, where it comes to be naturalized and win widespread acceptance, as itself a form of (specifically cultural) hegemony. It is the combination of the concepts of intertextuality and hegemony that makes the framework of chapter 3 a useful one for investigating discursive change in relation to social and cultural change. Which prior texts and text types are drawn upon in a given instance (a particular 'discursive event'), and how they are articulated, depends upon how the discursive event stands in relation to hegemonies and hegemonic struggles – whether, for example, it is contesting existing hegemonic practices and relations, or on the contrary taking them as given. The approach to discursive change set out in chapter 3 combines a view of text and discursive practice which derives from Bakhtin via Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (Bakhtin 1981 and 1986; Kristeva 1986a), and a view of power which derives from Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci 1971; Buci-Glucksmann 1980).

The framework of chapter 3 is elaborated in the chapters which follow. Chapter 4 takes up the concept of intertextuality in terms of a distinction between 'manifest' intertextuality (the explicit presence of other texts in a text) and 'interdiscursivity' (the constitution of a text from a configuration of text types or discourse conventions). I suggest a way of differentiating and relating 'genres', 'discourses', 'styles' and 'activity types' as different sorts of discourse conventions. The chapter also discusses intertextuality in relation to the social distribution of texts and the transformations they undergo, and in relation to the construction of social identity in discourse. In chapters 5 and 6 the emphasis is upon text analysis. These chapters address aspects of the vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, text structure, force, and coherence of texts (see p. 75 below for these terms). They also develop the view of discourse analysis as multifunctional: chapter 5 is mainly concerned with the function of discourse in constituting social identities and social relations, whereas the focus in chapter 6 is upon constituting, reproducing and changing systems of knowledge and belief in discourse. In chapter 7 the emphasis is upon the social practice dimension of discourse, and specifically upon certain broad tendencies of change affecting contemporary

orders of discourse (the 'democratization', 'commodification', and 'technologization' of discourse), and their relationship to social and cultural changes.

The analyses of change in chapters 4–7 feature a range of fields and institutions, with detailed analysis of samples of discourse. One issue addressed in chapter 4 is the way in which the mass media are shifting the boundary between the public and private spheres of social life. This not only involves questions of subject matter in media discourse, such as the treatment of aspects of private life as (public) news, but is also manifested intertextually in a mixing of discourse practices for the private sphere with those of the public sphere, with the result that some sections of the media use a stereotypical version of popular speech. Another issue is the pressure on service industries to treat their services as commodities and their clients as consumers, which is evident in the mixing of the discourse practices of information-giving and advertising. In chapter 5 I discuss changes in the social identities of professional workers and their clients and in the nature of interaction between them, focusing upon doctors and patients. I suggest that changes in doctor–patient identities and relations are discursively realized in a shift away from formal medical interviews to more conversational consultations, which may incorporate the discourse practices of counselling into those of more traditional medicine. Chapter 6 includes samples from two antenatal care booklets which exemplify contrasting representations of antenatal processes. I go on to discuss the engineering of semantic change as part of an attempt to effect cultural change, referring specifically to speeches by a minister in the Thatcher government on the theme of 'enterprise culture'. Chapter 7 returns to the theme of commodification and the mixing of information-giving and advertising, this time with reference to education, using the example of a university prospectus.

One of the aims of this book is to persuade readers that discourse analysis is an interesting sort of analysis to do, and to provide them with the resources for doing it. The final chapter of the book, chapter 8, draws together the material introduced in chapters 3–7 in the form of a set of guidelines for doing discourse analysis. These guidelines deal with the collection, transcription and coding of texts, and with the use of results, as well as with analysis.

1

Approaches to Discourse Analysis

My objective in this chapter is to describe briefly a number of recent and current approaches to discourse analysis, as a context and basis for the elaboration of my approach in chapters 3–8. Discourse analysis has now become a very diverse area of study, with a variety of approaches in each of a number of disciplines (some of the variety is represented in van Dijk 1985a). The survey of approaches in this chapter is therefore necessarily selective. I have chosen approaches which in some degree combine close analysis of language texts with a social orientation to discourse. This accords with my aim in later chapters to achieve an effective and usable combination of textual analysis and other modes of social analysis. I have also treated approaches selectively, focusing upon aspects of them which are closest to my priorities in this book.

The approaches surveyed can be divided into two groups according to the nature of their social orientation to discourse, distinguishing 'non-critical' and 'critical' approaches. Such a division is not absolute. Critical approaches differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants. The approaches I have designated as basically non-critical are: the framework for describing classroom discourse in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975); ethnomethodological work in 'Conversation

analysis'; the model for therapeutic discourse in Labov and Fanshel (1977); and a recent approach to discourse analysis developed by social psychologists Potter and Wetherell (1987). The critical approaches I have included are: the 'critical linguistics' of Fowler et al. (1979), and the French approach to discourse analysis developed on the basis of Althusser's theory of ideology by Pêcheux (Pêcheux 1982). The chapter concludes with a summary of key issues in discourse analysis drawn from this survey, which will serve as a point of departure for the presentation of my own approach in chapter 3.

Sinclair and Coulthard

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975; see also Coulthard 1977) worked towards a general descriptive system for analysing discourse, but they decided to focus upon the classroom because it is a formal situation whose discourse practice is likely to be governed by clear rules. Their descriptive system is based upon units which are assumed to be in the same relationship to each other as units in early forms of systemic grammar (Halliday 1961): there is a 'rank scale' of units, with units of higher rank being made up of units of the rank below. So, in grammar a sentence is made up of clauses, which are made up of groups, and so forth. Likewise, in classroom discourse, there are five units of descending rank – lesson, transaction, exchange, move, act – such that a lesson is made up of transactions, which are made up of exchanges, and so on.

Sinclair and Coulthard have little to say about the 'lesson', but they do suggest a clear structure for the 'transaction'. Transactions consist of exchanges. They are opened and closed by 'boundary exchanges' which consist minimally of 'framing moves' with or without other moves. For example, 'Well, today I thought we'd do three quizzes' consists of a framing move ('well') and a 'focusing' move which tells the class what the transaction will be about. Between the boundary exchanges there is usually a sequence of 'informing', 'directing' or 'eliciting' exchanges, in which respectively statements and requests (or commands) are made and questions are asked, usually by the teacher.

Let us look at the structure of one type of exchange, the

eliciting exchange. It typically consists of three moves: 'initiating', 'response' and 'feedback'. For example:

TEACHER: Can you tell me why do you eat all that food?
            Yes.
PUPIL: To keep you strong.
T: To keep you strong. Yes. To keep you strong.
            Why do you want to be strong?

The teacher's first contribution is an initiating move, the pupil's contribution is a response, and the first line of the teacher's second contribution is feedback; the second line is another initiating move. Notice that one contribution ('utterance') can consist of more than one move. The consistent presence of feedback presupposes that teachers have the power to evaluate pupils' contributions (one would rarely risk doing that outside a learning situation), and shows that much of classroom discourse is concerned with testing what pupils know, and training them to say things which are relevant according to criteria laid down by the schools.

A move consists of one or more acts. Sinclair and Coulthard distinguish 22 acts for classroom discourse, some of which (such as 'bid', when a child asks for the right to respond, perhaps by raising a hand) are quite specific to this discourse type. Others are less so: the initiating move of an eliciting exchange includes an 'elicitation', for example, while the initiating move of a directing exchange includes a 'directive'.

Acts are functional rather than formal categories, and a major issue is the relationship between them and the formal categories of grammar (this issue has received much attention within pragmatics, see Levinson 1983; Leech and Thomas 1989). It is well known that there are no simple correspondences. For example, an interrogative sentence (a 'grammatical question') can be a directive as well as an elicitation (e.g. 'Can you close the curtains?'), and a declarative sentence ('grammatical statement') can be either of these or an 'informative' act (e.g. 'The curtains aren't closed' can be asking for confirmation, requesting someone to close them, or just giving information). Sinclair and Coulthard refer to what they call 'situation' and 'tactics' for determining what function a sentence has in a particular piece of discourse. The former brings in situational factors which are relevant: for

example, if children know talking is not allowed in class, a declarative sentence from the teacher ('You're talking') will probably be interpreted as a command to stop. Like Labov and Fanshel (see below), Sinclair and Coulthard propose interpretative rules which take account of both the linguistic form of sentences and situational factors. 'Tactics' deals with the influence of the sequential position of a sentence in the discourse upon its interpretation. For example, a declarative sentence such as 'Perhaps it's different from the woman's point of view', coming after a feedback in a series of eliciting exchanges (i.e. where one would expect an initiating move), is likely to be interpreted as an elicitation despite the fact that most declaratives are not elicitations, and most elicitations are interrogative sentences.

The strength of the Sinclair and Coulthard framework is in the pioneering way in which it draws attention to systematic organizational properties of dialogue and provides ways of describing them. Its limitations are the absence of a developed social orientation to discourse, and insufficient attention to interpretation. These limitations can be related to their choice of data: they concentrate upon a traditional teacher-centred mode of classroom discourse, and their data does not reflect the diversity of current classroom practices. This makes classroom discourse seem more homogeneous than it actually is, and naturalizes dominant practices by making them appear to be the only practices. It presents them as simply 'there' and available for description, rather than as having been put there through processes of contestation with alternative practices, and as having been 'invested' (see p. 88 below) with particular ideologies (e.g. views of learning and learners), and as helping to sustain particular relations of power within society. In short, the Sinclair and Coulthard approach lacks a developed social orientation in failing to consider how relations of power have shaped discourse practices, and in failing to situate classroom discourse historically in processes of social struggle and change. A striking characteristic of contemporary classroom practice is its diversity; one wants to know why the traditional classroom discourse they describe is under pressure, and what is at stake.

The homogeneity of the data also draws attention away from the ambivalence of classroom discourse, and the diversity of possible interpretations. Consider this example from Coulthard (1977: 108):

TEACHER:	What kind of person do you think he is?
	Do you – what are you laughing at?
PUPIL:	Nothing.
T:	Pardon?
P:	Nothing.
T:	You're laughing at nothing, nothing at all?
P:	No.
	It's funny really 'cos they don't think as though they
	were there they might not like it and it sounds rather
	a pompous attitude.

Sinclair and Coulthard see this in terms of the pupil misinterpreting the situation, and so taking the teacher's question about laughter as disciplinary rather than dialogical in intent. But such examples also point to the potential heterogeneity of classroom discourse, the co-existence in schools of a repertoire of classroom discourses, which producers and interpreters of text need to take account of. This implies attention to discourse processes, both interpretation and production, whereas the emphasis in Sinclair and Coulthard is on texts as discourse products (though the category of 'tactics' implies some attention to interpretation). This also makes their position as analysts problematical, since analysts interpret texts rather than just describe them. In claiming to describe their data are not Sinclair and Coulthard actually interpreting it in a teacher-oriented way, for example, by seeing the pupil as 'misinterpreting' the teacher rather than, perhaps, being non-commital in response to an ambivalent question from the teacher? After all, 'nothing' is also ambivalent: it could mean 'I can't tell you what's making me laugh here.' This raises another problem with the framework: it forces decisions about the functions of utterances, whereas utterances are often really ambivalent for interpreters, rather than just ambiguous, as recent work in pragmatics has shown (see Levinson 1983), that is, their meanings are not clearly decidable.

Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) is an approach to discourse analysis which has been developed by a group of sociologists who call themselves 'ethnomethodologists'. Ethnomethodology is an inter-

pretative approach to sociology which focuses upon everyday life as a skilled accomplishment, and upon methods which people use for 'producing' it (Garfinkel 1967; Benson and Hughes 1983). Ethnomethodologists tend to avoid general theory, and discussion or use of concepts such as class, power or ideology, which are of central concern to mainstream sociology. Some ethnomethodologists take a particular interest in conversation and in the methods conversationalists use for producing and interpreting it (Schenkein 1978; Atkinson and Heritage 1984). Conversation analysts have concentrated mainly upon informal conversation between equals (e.g. telephone conversations), though some recent work has shifted to institutional types of discourse, where power asymmetries are more obvious (Button and Lee 1987). CA contrasts with the Sinclair and Coulthard approach by highlighting discourse processes, and correspondingly giving more attention to interpretation as well as production. Its conception of interpretation and process is a narrow one, however, as I shall argue below, and CA is comparable to Sinclair and Coulthard in its orientation to discovering structures in texts.

Conversation analysts have produced accounts of various aspects of conversation: conversational openings and closings; how topics are established, developed and changed; how people tell stories in the course of conversations; how and why people 'formulate' conversations (e.g. give their gist, suggest what they imply). Work on turn-taking, how conversationalists alternate in taking turns at speaking, has been particularly impressive and influential. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) propose a simple but powerful set of turn-taking rules. These rules apply at the completion of a 'turn-constructional unit': conversationalists build their turns with units such as a complex sentence, a simple sentence, a phrase, even a word, and participants are able to determine what this unit is and predict its point of completion with great accuracy. The rules are ordered: (i) the current speaker may select the next speaker; (ii) if not, the next speaker may 'self-select' by starting to produce a turn; (iii) if not, the current speaker may continue. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson argue that these rules account for many observed features of conversation: that overlaps between speakers occur but are generally short, that a great many transitions between turns occur with no gap and no overlap, and so forth. Despite the generality of the rules, they

allow for considerable variation in such features as the order and length of turns.

CA has laid considerable emphasis upon the 'sequential implicativeness' of conversation – the claim that any utterance will constrain what can follow it. 'Adjacency pairs' such as question-and-answer or complaint-and-apology are particularly clear examples: a question produced by one speaker sequentially implicates an answer from another. Evidence for x sequentially implicating y includes (i) the fact that whatever occurs after x will be taken as y if at all possible (for instance, if 'Is that your wife?' is followed by 'Well, it's not my mother', the latter is likely to be taken as an implied positive answer; and (ii) the fact that if y does not occur, its absence is noticed, and is commonly grounds for an inference (for example, if teachers fail to give feedback to learners' responses, this may be taken as implicitly rejecting them). According to Atkinson and Heritage (1984: 6), 'virtually every utterance occurs at some structurally defined place in talk.' One implication of this is that turns display an analysis of prior turns, giving constant evidence in the text of how utterances are interpreted.

Another implication is that the sequential position alone of an utterance is enough to determine its meaning. Yet this is highly questionable, on the twin grounds that (i) the effects of sequence upon meaning vary according to discourse type, and (ii), as I suggested in discussing Sinclair and Coulthard, a variety of discourse types may be drawn upon during an interaction, with participants as producers and interpreters constantly having to negotiate their positions in relation to this repertoire. Consider this extract from a medical interview which I analyse in chapter 5 (pp. 144–9 below):

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PATIENT:   and I think . that's one of the reasons why I drank
           s⌈o much you ⌈know – ⌈and em
DOCTOR:     ⌊hm         ⌊hm  hm⌊hm   are you
           you back are you back on it have you started
           drinking ⌈again
P:                   ⌊no
D:         oh you haven't (un⌈clear)
P:                           ⌊no . but em one thing that
           the lady on the Tuesday said to me
```

I shall suggest in my analysis of this fragment of an interview that it is a mixture of medical interview and counselling. Within such a mixture, what does sequence tell the interpreter about the doctor's question in his first turn? In a more conventional medical interview, a doctor's question immediately after a patient has alluded to a possibly dangerous medical condition (here, drinking) would probably be taken as a medical probe, requiring full attention from both participants. In a counselling session, such a question might be taken in a more conversational way as an aside showing that the counsellor is in tune with the patient's problems. Here the patient seems to take it as an aside: she gives perfunctory one-word answers to the main question and the doctor's acknowledgement of (and perhaps check upon?) the answer, and changes the subject back to her narrative of recent events. To make such an interpretative decision, the patient needs more than information about sequence: she needs to make judgements about the nature of the social event, the social relationship between herself and the doctor, and the discourse type. This implies a view of discourse processes and interpretation which is more complex than that generally assumed in CA – a view that can accommodate, for example, producers and interpreters negotiating their way within repertoires of discourse types. The example also suggests that analysis itself is a process of interpretation, and therefore a contentious and problematic practice. One gets little sense of this in CA. Yet, like Sinclair and Coulthard, analysts tend to interpret data on the basis of a shared orientation among participants to a single discourse type (though see Jefferson and Lee 1981). One effect is to give an overly harmonious and co-operative picture of conversation.

There is also a neglect of power as a factor in conversation. In the processes of negotiation I have referred to, some participants typically have more muscle than others, and in many types of discourse (e.g. classroom discourse) we do not find shared rules for turn-taking where participants have equal rights and obligations, but an asymmetrical distribution of rights (e.g. to self-select, to interrupt, to 'hold the floor' across several turns) and obligations (e.g. to take a turn if nominated to do so). In such cases it is evident that producing discourse is part of wider processes of producing social life, social relationships, and social identities; yet much CA in its harmonious reading of interaction

between equals gives the impression that producing discourse is an end in itself.

Despite different disciplinary starting points and theoretical orientations, the Sinclair and Coulthard and CA approaches have rather similar strengths and limitations: both have made important contributions to a new appreciation of the nature of structures in dialogue, but both have an undeveloped social orientation to discourse (in this respect CA suffers from the same inadequacies as Sinclair and Coulthard), and neither provides a satisfactory account of discourse processes and interpretation, though CA gives considerable insight into certain aspects of interpretation.

Labov and Fanshel

Labov and Fanshel (1977) is a study by a linguist and a psychologist of the discourse of the psychotherapeutic interview. Unlike Sinclair and Coulthard and CA, Labov and Fanshel assume the heterogeneity of discourse, which they see as reflecting the 'contradictions and pressures' (p. 35) of the interview situation. They agree with Goffman (1974) that shifts between 'frames' are a normal feature of conversation, and identify in their data a configuration of different 'styles' associated with different frames: 'interview style', 'everyday style' used in patients' narratives about 'life since the last visit' (N, for 'narrative', below) and 'family style' (F below), the style usually used in family situations, for expressing strong emotions.

Interviews are divided into 'cross-sections', corresponding approximately in extent to Sinclair and Coulthard's 'exchanges', though cross-sections can also be parts of monologues. The analysis of cross-sections emphasizes the existence of parallel verbal and paralinguistic 'streams of communication', the latter covering such features as pitch, volume, and voice qualifiers such as 'breathiness', and carrying implicit meanings which are 'deniable'. One variable between discourse types is the relative importance of the paralinguistic channel: in therapeutic discourse, contradictions between the explicit meanings of the verbal channel and the implicit meanings of the paralinguistic channel are a key feature.

The analysis produces an 'expansion' of each cross-section, a

formulation of the text which makes explicit what was implicit, by providing referents for pronouns, verbalizing the implicit meanings of the paralinguistic cues, introducing relevant factual material from other parts of the data, and making explicit some of the shared knowledge of the participants. Expansions are open-ended, and can be elaborated indefinitely. Here is a sample text, analysed in terms of styles, and its expansion:

<NAn-nd so—when—I called her t'day, I said, <F'Well, when do you plan t'come home?'>F>N

<NWhen I called my mother today (Thursday), I actually said, <F'Well, in regard to the subject which we both know is important and is worrying me, when are you leaving my sister's house where {2} your obligations have already been fulfilled and {4} returning as I am asking you to a home where {3} your primary obligations are being neglected, since you should do this as {HEAD-MO} head of our household?'>F>N

The symbols in curly brackets precede propositions which are recurrently taken as given. Some of these are specific to the particular interaction; others such as {HEAD-MO}, 'mother is the head of the household', have general implications in the culture for role obligations; and others are part of the standing assumptions of therapy (e.g. 'the therapist does not tell the patient what to do') or the culture (e.g. 'one should take care of oneself'). Propositions are rarely explicitly formulated, yet the main issue in an interaction may be whether an event is or is not an instance of some proposition. Moreover, propositions constitute implicit connections between parts of an interaction that are important for its coherence.

The cross-section is then analysed as an 'interaction' (glossed as an 'action which affects the relations of self and others'). Any utterance is assumed to be simultaneously performing a number of actions which are hierarchically ordered so that higher-level actions are performed by means of lower-level ones (a relationship marked by 'thereby' below). Thus for the sample above (I have simplified the Labov and Fanshel representation):

Rhoda (the patient) continues the narrative, and gives information to support her assertion that she carried out the suggestion {S}.

Rhoda requests information on the time her mother intends to come home, and thereby requests indirectly that her mother come home, thereby carrying out the suggestion {S}, thereby challenging her mother indirectly for not performing properly her role as head of the household, simultaneously admitting her own limitations, simultaneously asserting again that she carried out the suggestion.

The proposition {S} is the (therapist's) suggestion that one should express one's needs to other people. Such representations are based upon discourse rules proposed by Labov and Fanshel for interpreting the surface forms of utterances as particular sorts of action. For example, there is a 'rule of indirect requests' which specifies the conditions under which questions ('requests for information') are taken as requests for action. The analysis is completed with 'sequencing rules' for combining cross-sections together.

Labov and Fanshel refer to their approach as 'comprehensive' discourse analysis, and its exhaustiveness is certainly impressive, though also, as they point out, very time-consuming. They themselves identify a number of problems with it: paralinguistic cues are notoriously difficult to interpret, expansions can be endlessly expanded and there is no obviously motivated cut-off point, and expansions have the effect of flattening out important differences between foregrounded and backgrounded elements in discourse. I want, however, to focus my discussion upon two important insights in their approach which need to be taken further.

The first is the view that discourse may be stylistically heterogeneous due to contradictions and pressures in the speech situation. In the case of therapeutic discourse, for example, the suggestion is that use of 'everyday' and 'family' style is part of a patient strategy to establish some parts of the talk as immune to the intrusive expertise of the therapist. I have mentioned above the similarity of this to Goffman's concept of frames. The principle of the heterogeneity of discourse is a central element in my discussion of 'intertextuality' (pp. 84–5 below). I shall mention here just two differences between my position and Labov and Fanshel's. First, the embedding of one style within another, as in the sample above, is only one form of heterogeneity, and it often takes more complex forms where styles are difficult to

separate. Secondly, their view of heterogeneity is too static: they see therapeutic discourse as a stable configuration of styles, but they do not analyse heterogeneity dynamically as historical shifts in configurations of styles. The main value of the heterogeneity principle seems to lie in investigating discursive change within wider social and cultural change (see pp. 96–7 below for an elaboration of this perspective).

The second insight is that discourse is constructed upon implicit propositions which are taken for granted by participants, and which underpin its coherence. Again, this is an important principle whose potential and implications are not developed by Labov and Fanshel. In particular, they do not attend to the ideological character of some of these propositions – such as the role obligations associated with being a mother, or the individualistic ideology of the self in the proposition 'one should take care of oneself' – or to the ideological work of therapy in reproducing them without challenge, which is reminiscent of critiques of therapy as a mechanism for fitting people back into conventional social roles. In other words, Labov and Fanshel stop short of a *critical* analysis of therapeutic discourse, while providing valuable analytical resources for such an analysis.

Potter and Wetherell

As a final example of a non-critical approach to discourse analysis, I shall discuss Potter and Wetherell's (1987) use of discourse analysis as a method in social psychology. This is interesting in the present context, first because it shows how discourse analysis can be used to study issues which have traditionally been approached with other methods, and second because it raises the question of whether discourse analysis is concerned primarily with the 'form' or the 'content' of discourse. (See the criticism by Thompson (1984: 106–8) of Sinclair and Coulthard for being 'formalistic' and neglecting the content of classroom discourse.)

Potter and Wetherell's advocacy of discourse analysis as a method for social psychologists is based upon a single argument which is successively applied to several major areas of social-psychological research. The argument is that traditional social

psychology has misconceived and indeed 'suppressed' key prop-
erties of the language materials it uses as data; that discourse is
'constructive' and hence 'constitutes' objects and categories; and
that what a person says does not remain consistent from one
occasion to another, but varies according to the functions of talk.
The argument is first applied to research on attitudes: traditional
research assumed people have consistent attitudes to 'objects'
such as 'coloured immigrants', whereas discourse analysis shows
not only that people produce different and even contradictory
evaluations of an object according to the context, but also that the
object itself is constructed differently depending upon its evalua-
tion (so 'coloured immigrants' is a construction which many
people would reject). The argument is then applied to the study
of how people use rules, how people produce explanatory
accounts (excuses, justifications, etc.) of their behaviour, and
so forth, arguing in each case for the superiority of discourse
analysis over other methods, such as experimental methods.

Potter and Wetherell contrast the prioritization of content
in their approach with a prioritization of form in social-
psychological 'speech accommodation theory'. The latter is con-
cerned with how people modify their speech according to who
they are talking to, and thus with the variability of linguistic form
according to context and function; whereas in the former they are
concerned with the variability of linguistic content. In some cases,
the focus is the propositional content of utterances – for example,
in researching attitudes, what New Zealand respondents say
about whether Polynesian immigrants ought to be repatriated –
and upon the sorts of argument within which such propositions
function. In other cases, the focus is upon vocabulary and
metaphor – for example, the predicates (verbs, adjectives) and
metaphors used in association with 'community' in media reports
of the inner-city disturbances in Britain in 1980.

In fact the form-content distinction is not as clear as it may
appear to be. There are aspects of content which clearly edge over
into matters of form; for example, metaphor may be a question of
fusing different domains of meaning, but it is also a question of
what words are used in a text, which is an aspect of its form.
And, conversely, aspects of form edge over into content: the
mixture of styles in therapeutic discourse identified by Labov and
Fanshell is on one level a mixture of forms (they refer for example

to intonational contours which are typical of 'family' style) but is
also significant in terms of content, for instance in terms of the
construction of the patient as a particular sort of 'self' or subject.

Potter and Wetherell's analytical framework is impoverished
in comparison with other approaches: their 'content' amounts to
limited aspects of the 'ideational' or conceptual meaning of dis-
course, which leaves untouched other (broadly, 'interpersonal')
dimensions of meaning and associated aspects of form. ('Idea-
tional' and 'interpersonal' meaning are more fully explained on
pp. 64–5 below.) It is in Potter and Wetherell's treatment of
'the self' that these analytical limitations become most apparent.
In contrast with traditional treatments of the self in social
psychology, they adopt a constructivist position which empha-
sizes the variable constitution of the self in discourse. Yet they are
unable properly to operationalize this theory in their discourse
analysis, because (as I argue below, pp. 140–4) different selves
are implicitly signalled through configurations of many diverse
features of verbal (as well as bodily) behaviour, and one needs a
richer analytical apparatus than Potter and Wetherell's to describe
them.

Like other approaches referred to, Potter and Wetherell's is
insufficiently developed in its social orientation to discourse.
There is a one-sided individualistic emphasis upon the rhetorical
strategies of speakers in their discourse analysis. The discussion of
the self is an apparent exception, because a constructivist view of
the self emphasizes ideology and the social shaping of the self in
discourse, but this theory fits uneasily with the predominant
orientation of the book and is not operationalized in discourse
analysis. Finally, there is a tendency for the strategic or rhetorical
activity of the self in using categories, rules, etc. to be posed as an
alternative to the subjection of the self, rather than for the two to
be seen in a dialectical synthesis (see p. 65 below for an elabora-
tion of this view).

Critical Linguistics

'Critical linguistics' was the approach developed by a group based
at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (Fowler et al.
1979; Kress and Hodge 1979). They tried to marry a method of

linguistic text analysis with a social theory of the functioning of language in political and ideological processes, drawing upon the functionalist linguistic theory associated with Michael Halliday (1978, 1985) and known as 'systemic linguistics'.

In view of its disciplinary origins, it is not surprising that critical linguistics was eager to distinguish itself from mainstream linguistics (then more heavily dominated by the Chomskyan paradigm than it is now) and sociolinguistics (see Fowler et al. 1979: 185–95). Two 'prevalent and related dualisms' in linguistic theory are rejected: the treatment of language systems as autonomous and independent of the 'use' of language, and the separation of 'meaning' from 'style' or 'expression' (or 'content' from 'form'). Against the first dualism, critical linguistics asserts with Halliday that 'language is as it is because of its function in social structure' (Halliday 1973: 65), and argues that the language that people have access to depends upon their position in the social system. Against the second dualism, critical linguistics supports Halliday's view of the grammar of a language as systems of 'options' amongst which speakers make 'selections' according to social circumstances, assuming that formal options have contrasting meanings, and that choices of forms are always meaningful. Sociolinguistics is criticized for merely establishing correlations between language and society rather than looking for deeper causal relations, including the effects of language upon society: 'language serves to confirm and consolidate the organizations which shape it' (Fowler et al. 1979: 190).

The quotation from Halliday in the last paragraph reads more fully: 'language is as it is because of its function in the social structure, and the organization of behavioural meanings should give some insight into its social foundations' (Halliday 1973: 65). Kress suggests (1989: 445) that critical linguistics developed the claim in the second part of the quotation but not really that in the first: it 'attempted to "read off" structurings of "social foundations" from "the organization of behavioural meanings"' in texts. Critical linguistics again takes a Hallidayan position, in contrast with the practice of mainstream linguistics and sociolinguistics, in taking complete texts (spoken or written) as the object of analysis. The 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' that languages embody particular world-views is extended to varieties within a language; particular texts embody particular ideologies or theories, and the

aim is the 'critical interpretation' of texts: 'recovering the social meanings expressed in discourse by analysing the linguistic structures in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts' (Fowler et al. 1979: 195–6). The objective is to produce an analytic method which is usable by people who may, for example, be historians rather than specialists in linguistics.

For textual analysis, critical linguists draw heavily upon Halliday's work in 'systemic grammar' (see Halliday 1985), as well as using concepts from other theories such as 'speech act' and 'transformation'. Critical linguistics differs from other approaches in the attention it gives to the grammar and vocabulary of texts. There is much reference to 'transitivity', the aspect of the grammar of a clause or sentence that relates to its ideational meaning, that is, the way it represents reality (for a detailed discussion of transitivity, see pp. 177–85 below). The grammar provides different 'process types' and associated 'participants' as options, and systematic selection of a particular process type may be ideologically significant. For example, the Communist newspaper *The Morning Star* (21 April 1980) formulates part of a report on a health service union day of action as an actional process with workers ('northerners') as the actor: 'Parliament was hit by hundreds of northerners.' This might have been formulated as a 'relational' process in which the meaning of 'workers taking action' is less prominent (e.g. 'There was a lobby of Parliament by hundreds of northerners').

Another related focus is upon grammatical processes of 'transformation' looked at either in real time (for example, the transformations associated with the development of a story in a newspaper over a period of days, discussed in Trew 1979), or more abstractly, for example where what might have been formulated as a clause ('x criticized y a lot') is actually formulated in a transformed way as a 'nominalization' ('there was much criticism'). Nominalization is the conversion of a clause into a nominal or noun, here 'criticism' from 'x criticized y'. Another transformation is 'passivization', the conversion of an active clause into a passive clause (e.g. the headline 'Demonstrators are Shot (by Police)', rather than 'Police Shoot Demonstrators'). Such transformations may be associated with ideologically significant features of texts such as the systematic mystification of agency: both allow the agent of a clause to be deleted.