

3 Tools of inquiry and discourses

3.1 Tools

In the last chapter we looked at seven “building tasks,” that is, seven areas or things that we use language to build. We now turn to some tools we can use to analyze the workings of these building tasks in specific instances of language-in-use. The tools of inquiry I introduce in this chapter are primarily relevant to how people build identities and activities and recognize identities and activities that others are building around them. However, the tools of inquiry introduced here are most certainly caught up with all the other building tasks we discussed in the last chapter, as well, and we will see this progressively throughout this book.

The tools of inquiry to be discussed in this chapter are described below.

“Social languages”

People use different styles or varieties of language for different purposes. They use different varieties of language to enact and recognize different identities in different settings; they also use different varieties of language to engage in all the other building tasks discussed in the last chapter. I will call each such variety a “social language.” For example, a student studying hornworms might say in everyday language, a variety of language often referred to as “vernacular language,” something like “Hornworms sure vary a lot in how big they get,” while the same student might use a more technical variety of language to say or write something like “Hornworm growth exhibits a significant amount of variation.” The vernacular version is one social language and the technical version is another. Investigating how different social languages are used and mixed is one tool of inquiry for engaging in discourse analysis.

“Discourses”

People build identities and activities not just through language but by using language together with other “stuff” that isn’t language. If you want to get recognized as a

street-gang member of a certain sort you have to speak in the “right” way, but you have to act and dress in the “right” way, as well. You also have to engage (or, at least, behave as if you are engaging) in characteristic ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, and believing. You also have to use or be able to use various sorts of symbols (e.g., graffiti), tools (e.g., a weapon), and objects (e.g., street corners) in the “right” places and at the “right” times. You can’t just “talk the talk,” you have to “walk the walk” as well. The same is true of doing/being a corporate lawyer, Marine sergeant, radical feminist, or a regular at the local bar. One and the same person might talk, act, and interact in such a way as to get recognized as a “street-gang member” in one context and, in another context, talk, act, and interact in quite different ways so as to get recognized as a “gifted student.” And, indeed, these two identities, and their concomitant ways of talking, acting, and interacting, may well conflict with each other in some circumstances (in which different people expect different identities from the person), as well as in the person’s own mind. I use the term “Discourse,” with a capital “D,” for ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity. Thinking about the different Discourses a piece of language is part of is another tool for engaging in discourse analysis.

Intertextuality

When we speak or write, our words often allude to or relate to, in some fashion, other “texts” or certain types of “texts,” where by “texts” I mean words that other people have said or written. For example, *Wired* magazine once printed a story with this title: “The New Face of the Silicon Age: Tech jobs are fleeing to India faster than ever. You got a problem with that?” (February 2004). The sentence “You got a problem with that?” reminds us of “tough guy” talk we have heard in many movies or read in books. It intrigues us that such talk occurs written in a magazine devoted to technology. This sort of cross-reference to another text or type of text I will refer to as “intertextuality.” In instances of intertextuality, one spoken or written text alludes to, quotes, or otherwise relates to, another one.

“Conversations”

Sometimes when we talk or write, our words don’t just allude or relate to someone else’s words (as in the case of intertextuality), but to themes, debates, or motifs that have been the focus of much talk and writing in some social group with which we are familiar or in our society as a whole. These themes, debates, or motifs play a role in how language is interpreted. For example, how do you know that when I tell you “Smoking is associated with health problems” I mean to say that smoking leads to health problems and not that health problems lead people to smoke because,

say, their health problems are making them nervous and they are smoking in order to calm down (the most probable meaning for a sentence like “Writing a will is associated with health problems”)? You know this because you are well aware of the long-running discussions in our society over the ill-effects of smoking. I refer to all the talk and writing that has gone on in a specific social group or in society at large around a major theme, debate, or motif as a “Conversation” with a capital “C,” using the term metaphorically, of course. Most of us today are aware of the societal Conversations going on around us about things like abortion, creationism, global warming, terrorism, and so on and so forth through many other issues. To know about these Conversations is to know about the various sides one can take in debates about these issues and what sorts of people are usually on each side. As members of various social groups and of our society as a whole, we are privy (know something about) to a great many such Conversations. People interpret our language – and we interpret theirs – partly through such knowledge. Thinking about the different Conversations a piece of language impinges on or relates to is another tool for engaging in discourse analysis.

3.2 Discourses: *whos* and *whats*

Let’s start by trying to get at the notion of a “big D” Discourse. We begin with the question of *who* you are when you speak or write and *what* you are doing. When you speak or write anything, you use the resources of English to project yourself as a certain kind of person, a different kind in different circumstances. You also project yourself as engaged in a certain kind of activity, a different kind in different circumstances. If I have no idea who you are and what you are doing, then I cannot make sense of what you have said, written, or done.

You project a different identity at a formal dinner party than you do at the family dinner table. And, though these are both dinner, they are nonetheless different activities. The fact that people have differential access to different identities and activities, connected to different sorts of status and social goods, is a root source of inequality in society. Intervening in such matters can be a contribution to social justice. Since different identities and activities are enacted in and through language, the study of language is integrally connected to matters of equity and justice.

An oral or written “utterance” has meaning, then, only if and when it communicates a *who* and a *what* (Wieder and Pratt 1990a). What I mean by a “who” is a *socially situated identity*, the “kind of person” one is seeking to be and enact here-and-now. What I mean by a “what” is a *socially situated activity* that the utterance helps to constitute. Such identities and activities are, of course, two of the building tasks we discussed in Chapter 2.

Lots of interesting complications can set in when we think about identity enacted in and through language. *Whos* can be multiple and they need not always be people. The President’s press secretary can issue an utterance that is, in fact, authored by

a speech writer and authorized (and even claimed) by the President. In this case, the utterance communicates a sort of overlapping and compound *who*. The press secretary, even if she is directly quoting the speech writer, must inflect the remark with her own voice. In turn, the speech writer is both “mimicking” the President’s “voice” and creating an identity for him.

Not just individuals, but also institutions, through the “anonymous” texts and products they circulate, can author or issue “utterances.” For example, we will see below that the warning on an aspirin bottle actually communicates multiple *whos*. An utterance can be authored, authorized by, or issued by a group or a single individual.

Finally, we can point out that *whos* and *whats* are not really discrete and separable. You are *who* you are partly through *what* you are doing and *what* you are doing is partly recognized for what it is by *who* is doing it. So it is better, in fact, to say that utterances communicate an integrated, though often multiple or “heteroglossic,” *who-doing-what*.

3.3 “Real Indians”

Though I have focused on language, thus far, it is important to see that making visible and recognizable *who* we are and *what* we are doing always requires more than language. It requires, as well, that we act, think, value, and interact in ways that together with language render *who* we are and *what* we are doing recognizable to others (and ourselves). In fact, to be a particular *who* and to pull off a particular *what* requires that we act, value, interact, and use language *in sync with or in coordination with* other people and with various objects (“props”) in appropriate locations and at appropriate times.

To see this wider notion of language as integrated with “other stuff” (other people, objects, values, times and places), we will briefly consider Wieder and Pratt’s (1990a,b) fascinating work on how Native Americans recognize each other as “really Indian” (their work is based on a variety of different groups, though no claim is made that it is true of all Native American groups). Wieder and Pratt point out that real Indians “refer to persons who are ‘really Indian’ in just those words with regularity and standardization” (Wieder and Pratt 1990a: 48). Wieder and Pratt’s work will also make clear how the identities (the *whos*) we take on are flexibly negotiated in actual contexts of practice.

The term “real Indian” is, of course, an “insiders’ term.” The fact that it is used by some Native Americans in enacting their own identity work does not license non-Native Americans to use the term. Thus, though it may clutter the text, I will below always place the term “real Indian” in quotes to make clear that I am talking about the term and not claiming that I have the “right” to actually use it of anyone. Finally, let me say that I am not discussing Native Americans here because I think they are “esoteric.” In fact, I am using this example, because I think it is a clear and dramatic example of what we *all* do all the time, though in different ways.

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

A “real Indian” is not something one can simply be. Rather, it something that one becomes or is *in the doing* of it, that is, in the performance. Though one must have certain kinship ties to get in the “game,” beyond this entry criterion, there is no *being* (once and for all) a “real Indian,” rather there is only *doing being-or-becoming-a-“real-Indian.”* If one does not continue to “practice” being a “real Indian,” one ceases to be one.

Finally, “doing” being-or-becoming-a-“real-Indian” is not something that one can do all by oneself. It requires the participation of others. One cannot be a “real Indian” unless one appropriately recognizes other “real Indians” and gets recognized by others as a “real Indian” in the practices of doing being-or-becoming-a-“real-Indian.” Being a “real Indian” also requires appropriate accompanying objects (props), times, and places.

There are a multitude of ways one can do being-and-becoming-a-“real-Indian.” Some of these are (following Wieder and Pratt 1990a,b): “Real Indians” prefer to avoid conversation with strangers, Native American or otherwise. They cannot be related to one another as “mere acquaintances,” as some “non-Indians” might put it. So, for “real Indians,” any conversation they do have with a stranger who may turn out to be a “real Indian” will, in the discovery of the other’s “Indianness,” establish substantial obligations between the conversational partners just through the mutual acknowledgment that they are “Indians” and that they are now no longer strangers to one another.

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

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

“Real Indians” must be competent in “doing their part” in participating in conversations that begin with the participants’ exchanging greetings and other ameni-

ties and then lapsing into extended periods of silence. They must know that neither they nor the others have an obligation to speak – that silence on the part of all conversants is permissible.

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

While the above sort of information gives us something of the flavor of what sorts of things one must do and say to get recognized as a “real Indian,” such information can lead to a bad mistake. It can sound as if the above features are necessary and sufficient criteria for doing being-and-becoming-a-“real-Indian.” But this is not true.

These features are not a test that can be or ever is administered all at once, and once and for all, to determine who is or is not a “real Indian.” Rather, the circumstances under which these features are employed by “Indians” emerge over the course of a developing history among groups of people. They are employed always in the context of actual situations, and at different times in the life history of groups of people. The ways in which the judgment “He (or she) is (or is not) a ‘real Indian’” is embedded within situations that motivate it make such judgments intrinsically provisional. Those now recognized can spoil their acceptance or have it spoiled and those not now accepted can have another chance, even when others are reluctant to extend it.

The same thing applies, in fact, in regard to many other social identities, not just being “a real Indian.” There are no once and for all tests for who is a “real” feminist, gang member, patriot, humanist, cutting-edge scientist, “yuppie,” or “regular” at the local bar. These matters are settled provisionally and continually, in practice, as part and parcel of shared histories and ongoing activities. When I was young, my community certainly had tests through which we continually, always provisionally, and sometimes contentiously, displayed and recognized who was and was not a “real Catholic” (versus being a “Catholic in name only” or being a non-Catholic). That community and those tests have, over the last several decades, changed radically, however much we then viewed them as static and eternal.

Different social identities (different *whos*) may seriously conflict with one another. For instance, Scollon and Scollon (1981) point out that, for the Native Americans they studied (Athabaskans in Canada and the US), writing essays, a practice common in school, can constitute a crisis in identity. To produce an essay requires the Athabaskan to produce a major self-display, which is appropriate to Athabaskans

only when a person is in a position of dominance in relation to the audience (in the case of school, this is the teacher, not the student).

Furthermore, in essayist prose, the audience and the author are “fictionalized” (not really me and you, but decontextualized and rather generic “types” of readers and writers) and the text is decontextualized from specific social networks and relationships. Where the relationship of the communicants is decontextualized and unknown, Athabaskans prefer silence.

The paradox of prose for Athabaskans, the Scollons point out, is that if it is communication between known author and audience it is contextualized and compatible with Athabaskan values, but not good essayist prose. To the extent that it becomes decontextualized and thus good essayist prose, it becomes uncharacteristic of Athabaskans to seek to communicate. What is required to do and be an Athabaskan is in large part mutually exclusive with what is required to do and be a writer of school-based essayist prose. This doesn’t mean that Athabaskans cannot do both (remember, we are all multiple), it simply means that they may face very real conflicts in terms of values and identity. And, as the Scollons point out, many other groups of people have similar or related “identity issues” with essayist literacy.

3.4 Discourses (with a big “D”)

So how does someone get recognized as a “real Indian” (a *who*) engaged in verbal sparring of the sort “real Indians” do (a *what*)? Such matters are consequential, as we said above: “By correctly responding to and correctly engaging in this sparring, which ‘Indians’ call ‘razzing,’ each participant further establishes cultural competency in the eyes of the other.” This is a problem of “recognition and being recognized.”

The problem of “recognition and being recognized” is very consequential not only for Native Americans, but for all of us all the time. And, as we saw above, making visible and recognizable *who* we are and *what* we are doing always involves a great deal more than “just language.” It involves acting-interacting-thinking-valuing-talking-(sometimes writing-reading) in the “appropriate way” with the “appropriate” props at the “appropriate” times in the “appropriate” places.

Such socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting, in the “right” places and at the “right” times with the “right” objects (associations that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network”), I will refer to as “Discourses,” with a capital “D” (Gee 1990a, 1992, 1996; see also Foucault 1985; Bourdieu 1990a). I will reserve the word “discourse,” with a little “d,” to mean language-in-use or stretches of language (like conversations or stories). “Big D” Discourses are always language *plus* “other stuff.”

There are innumerable Discourses in any modern, technological, urban-based society: for example, (enacting) being something as general as a type of African-

American or Anglo-Australian or something as specific as a type of modern British young second-generation affluent Sikh woman. Being a type of middle-class American, factory worker, or executive, doctor or hospital patient, teacher, administrator, or student, student of physics or of literature, member of a club or street gang, regular at the local bar, or, as we have just seen, “real Indian” are all Discourses.

The key to Discourses is “recognition.” If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others *recognize* you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here-and-now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer). Whatever you have done must be similar enough to other performances to be recognizable. However, if it is different enough from what has gone before, but still recognizable, it can simultaneously change and transform Discourses. If it is not recognizable, then you’re not “in” the Discourse.

Discourses are always embedded in a medley of social institutions, and often involve various “props” such as books and magazines of various sorts, laboratories, classrooms, buildings of various sorts, various technologies, and a myriad of other objects from sewing needles (for sewing circles) through birds (for bird watchers) to basketball courts and basketballs (for basketball players). Think of all the words, symbols, deeds, objects, clothes, and tools you need to coordinate in the right way at the right time and place to “pull off” (or recognize someone as) being a cutting-edge particle physicist or a Los Angeles Latino street-gang member or a sensitive high-culture humanist (of old).

It is sometimes helpful to think about social and political issues as if it is not just us humans who are talking and interacting with each other, but, rather, the Discourses we represent and enact, and for which we are “carriers.” The Discourses we enact existed before each of us came on the scene and most of them will exist long after we have left the scene. Discourses, through our words and deeds, have talked to each other through history, and, in doing so, form human history.

Think, for instance, of the long-running and ever-changing historical interchange in the USA and Canada between the Discourses of “being an Indian” and “being an Anglo” or of the different, but equally long-running, historical interchange in New Zealand between “being a Maori” and “being an Anglo” (or, for that matter, think of the long-running interchange between “being a British Anglo” and “being an American Anglo”). Think of the long-running and ever-changing interchange between creationists and biologists. Think of the long-running and ever-changing interchange in Los Angeles between African-American teenage gang members and the Los Angeles police (some of whom, for instance, are leading experts, even academically speaking, on the “grammar” of gang graffiti, which varies significantly, by the way, between African-American gangs and Latino gangs). Intriguingly, we

humans are very often unaware of the history of these interchanges, and, thus, in a deep sense, not fully aware of what we mean when we act and talk.

When we discussed being a “real Indian,” we argued that “knowing how” to be a “real Indian” rests on one’s being able to “be in sync with other ‘real Indians’” and with objects (e.g., the material items of the culture) in the appropriate times and places. Recent studies of science suggest much the same thing is true for scientists.

For example, these studies argue that the physics experimental physicists “know” is, in large part, *not* in their heads. Rather, it is spread out (distributed), inscribed in (and often trapped in) apparatus, symbolic systems, books, papers, and journals, institutions, habits of bodies, routines of practice, and other people (Latour 1987; Traweek 1988). Each domain of practice, each scientific Discourse – for example, a specific area within physics or biology – *attunes* actions, expressions, objects, and people (the scientists themselves) so that they become “workable” *in relation* to each other (Knorr Cetina 1992). They are “in sync.”

Just as there are verbal and non-verbal ways to be a “real Indian,” there are verbal and non-verbal ways to be a “real experimental physicist.” Being an experimental physicist or being a “real Indian” are ways with words, feelings, values, beliefs, emotions, people, actions, things, tools, and places that allow us to display and recognize characteristic *whos* doing characteristic *whats*. They are both, then, Discourses.

The scientist’s “knowhow” is the ability to *coordinate and be coordinated by* constellations of expressions, actions, objects, and people. In a sense, the scientist is *both* an actor (coordinating other people and various things, tools, technologies, and symbol systems) and a *patient* (being coordinated by other people and various things, tools, technologies, and symbol systems). Scientists become *agent-patients* “in sync with,” “linked with,” “in association with,” “in coordination with,” however we want to put it, other “actants” (adapting a term from Callon and Latour 1992), such as particular forms of language, other people, objects (e.g., scientific equipment, atoms, molecules, or birds), places (e.g., laboratories or fields), and non-verbal practices.

In the end, a Discourse is a “dance” that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times, and places and in the here-and-now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination. Like a dance, the performance here-and-now is never exactly the same. It all comes down, often, to what the “masters of the dance” (the people who inhabit the Discourse) will allow to be recognized or will be forced to recognize as a possible instantiation of the dance.

3.5 Discourses are not “units” with clear boundaries

The notion of Discourses will be important throughout this book. It is important, therefore, to make some points clear to avoid some common misunderstandings. Imagine I freeze a moment of thought, talk, action, or interaction for you, in the way that a projector can freeze a piece of film. To make sense of that moment, you

have to recognize the identities and activities involved in it. Perhaps, for this frozen moment you can't do so, so you move the film back and forward enough until you can make such a recognition judgment.

"Oh, now I see," you say, "It's a 'real Indian' razzing another 'real Indian,'" or "It's a radical feminist berating a male for a crass patriarchal remark" or "It's a laboratory physicist orienting colleagues to a graph" or "It's a first-grader in Ms. X's class starting a sharing time story." Perhaps, if you now move the film backwards and forwards a bit more, you will change your judgments a little, a lot, or not at all.

Perhaps, you aren't sure. You and I even argue about the matter. You say that "It's a skinhead sending intimating glances to a passing adult on the street" and I say, "No, its just a wanna-be trying to act tough." You say, "It's a modern classroom teacher leading a discussion" and I say, "No, it's a traditional teacher giving a hidden lecture in the guise of a series of known-answer questions to the students."

This is what I call "recognition work." People engage in such work when they try to make visible to others (and to themselves, as well) who they are and what they are doing. People engage in such work when they try to recognize others for who they are and what they are doing. People engage in such work within interactions, moment by moment. They engage in such work when they reflect on their interactions later. They engage in such work, as well, when they try to understand human interaction as researchers, practitioners, theoreticians, or interventionists of various sorts.

Sometimes such recognition work is conscious, sometimes it is not. Sometimes people have labels they can articulate for the *whos* and *whats* they recognize, sometimes they don't. Sometimes they fight over the labels, sometimes they don't. And the labels change over time.

Thanks to the fact that we humans engage in recognition work, Discourses exist in the world. For example, there is a way of being a kindergarten student in Ms. X's class with its associated activities and ways with words, deeds, and things. Ms. X, her students, her classroom, with its objects and artifacts, and characteristic activities, are all *in* the Discourse she and her students create. These same people and things, of course, can be in other Discourses as well.

Recognition work and Discourses out in the world go hand-in-hand. Ms. X and her students engage in recognition work, for example when a certain sort of sharing time story isn't recognized as "acceptable" in this class and another type is. That recognition work creates a Discourse, that is, ways with words, actions, beliefs, emotions, values, interactions, people, objects, tools, and technologies that come to constitute "being and doing a student in Ms. X's class." In turn, this Discourse renders recognition work possible and meaningful. It's another "chicken and egg" question, then: which comes first, recognition work or Discourses? Neither. They are reflexively related, such that each creates the other.

Discourses have no discrete boundaries because people are always, in history, creating new Discourses, changing old ones, and contesting and pushing the bound-

aries of Discourses. You, an African-American male, speak and act here-and-now in an attempt to get recognized as a “new capitalist manager coaching a project team.” If you get recognized as such, then your performance is *in the Discourse* of new capitalist management. If you don’t, it isn’t.

If your performance has been influenced, intentionally or not, by another one of your Discourses (say, your membership in the Discourse of doing and being a jazz fan or your membership in a certain version of African-American culture as a Discourse), and it gets recognized in the new capitalist management Discourse, then you just, at least for here-and-now, “infected” one Discourse with another and widened what “counts” in the new capitalist management Discourse. You pushed the boundaries. In another time and place they may get narrowed.

You can get several of your Discourses recognized all at once. You (thinking of one of my esteemed colleagues at a university where I previously worked) “pull off” being here-and-now, in a class or meeting, for example, “a British, twice-migrant, globally oriented, traditional and modern, fashionable, female, Sikh, American professor of cultural studies and feminist postmodern anthropology” by weaving strands of your multiple Discourses together. If this sort of thing gets enacted and recognized enough, by enough people, then it will become not multiple strands of multiple Discourses interwoven, but a single Discourse whose hybridity may ultimately be forgotten. The point is *not* how we “count” Discourses; the point is the performance, negotiation, and recognition work that goes into creating, sustaining, and transforming them, and the role of language (always with other things) in this process.

Several other brief, but important points about Discourses are given in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 Important points about Discourses

- 1 Discourses can split into two or more Discourses. For example, medieval “natural philosophy” eventually split into philosophy and physics and other sciences.
- 2 Two or more Discourses can meld together. For example, after the movie *Colors* came out some years ago, mixed Latino, African-American, and white gangs emerged. Prior to that, Latinos, African-Americans, and whites had quite separate ways of being and doing gangs, as they still do in the case of segregated gangs.
- 3 It can be problematic whether a Discourse today is or is not the same as one in the past. For example, modern medicine bears little similarity to medicine before the nineteenth century, but, perhaps, enough to draw some important parallels for some purposes, though not for others.

- 4 New Discourses emerge and old ones die all the time. For example, in Palmdale, California (a desert community outside Los Angeles), and I assume other places, as well, an anti-racist skinhead Discourse is dying because people, including the police, tend to confuse its members with a quite separate, but similar looking, racist neo-Nazi skinhead Discourse.
- 5 Discourses are always defined in relationships of complicity and contestation with other Discourses, and so they change when other Discourses in a society emerge or die. For example, the emergence of a “new male” Discourse in the 1970s (ways of doing and being a “new male”) happened in response to various gender-based Discourses (e.g., various sorts of feminism) and class-based Discourses (the baby-boom middle class was too big for all young males to stay in it, so those who “made it” needed to mark their difference from those who did not), and, in turn, changed the meanings and actions of these other Discourses.
- 6 Discourses need, by no means, be “grand” or large scale. I used to eat regularly at a restaurant with a long bar. Among regulars, there were two different Discourses at opposite ends of the bar, that is, ways of being and doing that end of the bar. One involved young men and women and a lot of male-dominated sexual bantering; the other involved older people and lots of hard luck stories. The restaurant assigned different bartenders to each end (always a young female at the young end) and many of the bartenders could fully articulate the Discourse at their end of the bar and their role in it.
- 7 Discourses can be hybrids of other Discourses. For example, the school yards of many urban middle and high schools are places where teenagers of different ethnic groups come together and engage in what I (Gee 1996) have elsewhere called a “borderland Discourse” of doing and being urban teenager peers, when they cannot safely go into each other’s neighborhoods and when they each have their own neighborhood peer-based Discourses. The borderland Discourse is quite manifestly a mixture of the various neighborhood peer Discourses, with some emergent properties of its own.
- 8 There are limitless Discourses and no way to count them, both because new ones, even quite non-grand ones, can always emerge and because boundaries are always contestable.

One way to think about the role of Discourses is this. Imagine you have a giant map. Each Discourse is represented on the map like a country, but with movable boundaries that you can slide around a bit. You place the map on top of any language, action, or interaction you participate in or want to think about. You move the boundaries of the Discourse areas on the map around in negotiation with others or as your reflections change.

The map gives you a way to understand what you are seeing in relationship to the full set of Discourses in an institution (maybe it is just a map of all the Discourses in a given community, business, school, or university) or the society as a whole (if it's a map of the whole society), at least as far as you know it. Wherever on the map you line up the current thought, action, interaction, or language, it is immediately placed in relation to all the other countries (Discourses) on the map (though "fuzzily," since you can move the boundaries around or others can try to make you do so).

Such a map is a Discourse grid against which you understand your own and others' thought, language, action, and interaction. It is an ever-changing map with which you can engage in recognition work. It is, as it exists across people and social groups, both the origin and the product of the reality of actual Discourses in the world, aligning and disaligning themselves with each other through history.

Understanding is always relative to the whole grid or map. The complex relationships among Discourses, which we can imagine as intricate criss-crossing lines connecting the various Discourse-areas on the map in complex positive and negative ways, define and demarcate individual Discourses. Your own Discourse grid is the limits of your understanding, and it is the fundamental job of education to give people bigger and better Discourse maps, ones that reflect the working of Discourses throughout society, the world, and history in relationship to each other and to the learner.

So Discourses are out in the world and history as coordinations ("a dance") of people, places, times, actions, interactions, verbal and non-verbal expression, symbols, things, tools, and technologies that betoken certain identities and associated activities. Thus, they are material realities. But Discourses exist, also, as work to get people and things recognized in certain ways and not others, and they exist, as well, as maps that constitute our understandings. They are, then, social practices and mental entities, as well as material realities.

3.6 Discourses as "kits"

If you are having trouble understanding the notion of "big D" Discourses, maybe this will help. Think for a minute of all the stuff you would put into the "Barbie doll" Discourse, restricting ourselves for the moment just to Barbie dolls and their accoutrements. How do you recognize something as in the "Barbie doll" world or Discourse, even if it hasn't got the Barbie logo on it? Girl and boy (e.g., Ken)

Barbie dolls look a certain way (e.g., their bodies have certain sorts of shapes and not others). They have characteristic sorts of clothes and accessories. They talk and act in certain ways in books, games, and television shows. They display certain sorts of values and attitudes. This configuration of words and things is the Barbie doll Discourse. You interpret everything Barbie within this frame. It is a sort of kit made of words, things, values, attitudes, and so forth from which one could build Barbie doll meanings. Even if you want to demean the Barbie doll Discourse by making a parody Barbie doll (such as Australia's "feral Cheryl") you have to recognize the Discourse in the first place.

Now imagine real people wanted to enact a Barbie Discourse. We know what they would have to look, act, interact, and talk like. We know what values and attitudes they would have to display. We know what sorts of objects, accessories, and places they would associate themselves with. They would draw these out of their now real-world Barbie kit. In fact, young people sometimes talk about someone, usually a girl, as being or trying to be a Barbie doll type of person.

The workings of society and history have given rise to innumerable kits with which we can live out our social lives as different and multiple kinds of people, different for different times and places – hopefully not as Barbie dolls, but as men, women, workers, students, gamers, lovers, bird watchers, environmentalists, radicals, conservatives, feminists, African-Americans, scientists, bar members (lawyers or drinkers) of different types, and so on and so forth through an endless and changing list.

3.7 Note

The term "Discourse" (with a big "D") is meant to cover important aspects of what others have called discourses (Foucault 1966, 1969, 1973, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1985); communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991); cultural communities (Clark 1996); discourse communities (Miller 1984; Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995); distributed knowledge or distributed systems (Lave 1988; Hutchins 1995); thought collectives (Fleck 1979); practices (Heidegger 1962; Bourdieu 1977, 1985, 1990a,b; Barton and Hamilton 1998); cultures (Geertz 1973, 1983); activity systems (Leont'ev 1981; Engeström 1987, 1990; Wertsch 1998); actor-actant networks (Latour 1987; Callon and Latour 1992); and (one interpretation of) "forms of life" (Wittgenstein 1958).

Discourses, for me, crucially involve (a) situated identities; (b) ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities; (c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places, and times; (d) characteristics ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening (and, in some Discourses, reading-and-writing, as well).

A given Discourse can involve multiple identities. For example, a teacher, Ms

X, and her kindergarten students can take on different situated identities, different from each other and different within different activities, within the “Ms X-and-her-students’ classroom Discourse,” provided that Ms X has, in fact, created a coherent Discourse in and around her classroom. For instance, in one second-grade classroom I visited, one African-American boy was referred to as “at risk” (for school failure), “one of my good readers” (good enough to be in a high reading group, but not to be pulled out during reading time to go to the gifted program for reading, despite the fact that both groups were reading at the same grade level), “well behaved,” and “disaffiliated from the teacher.” These are all identities that the teacher’s classroom Discourse made available for this student. We can ask, of course, for each of these identities, and for other identities this child has within this classroom Discourse, which he is seeking to enact and which is being attributed to him based on behaviors that may, in fact, be bids for other identities.

Some people dislike the term “situated identity” and prefer, instead, something like “(social) position” or “subjectivity” (they tend to reserve the term “identity” for a sense of self that is relatively continuous and “fixed” over time). I use the term “identity” (or, to be specific, “socially situated identity”) for the multiple identities we take on in different practices and contexts and would use the term “core identity” for whatever continuous and relatively (but only relatively) “fixed” sense of self underlies our contextually shifting multiple identities.

4 Social languages, conversations, and intertextuality

4.1 Whos-doing-whats in language

This chapter will develop three of the tools of inquiry we discussed in the last chapter. First I discuss “social languages,” then “intertextuality,” and then “Conversations.” Social languages are different varieties of language that allow us to express different socially significant identities (e.g., talking and writing as a mathematician, doctor, or gang member) and enact different socially meaningful activities (e.g., offering a proof in mathematics, writing a prescription in medicine, demonstrating solidarity with a fellow gang member). Intertextuality refers to cases where one oral or written text directly or indirectly quotes another text or alludes to another text in yet more subtle ways. “Conversations” (with a capital “C”) are debates in society or within specific social groups (over focused issues such as smoking, abortion, or school reform) that large numbers of people recognize, in terms of both what “sides” there are to take in such debates and what sorts of people tend to be on each side.

So, we turn now to the notion of social languages. The last chapter argued that to study language-in-use we need to study more than language alone, we need to study Discourses. Discourses are ways with words, deeds and interactions, thoughts and feelings, objects and tools, times and places that allow us to enact and recognize different socially situated identities. However, as linguistic discourse analysts, we often pay attention primarily to language and for a while, at least, leave non-language “stuff” out of consideration. When we do so, we are looking at how people communicate *who* they are and *what* they are doing by the ways in which they put language to use. Of course, they are always also communicating via non-verbal elements such as ways of acting, interacting, valuing, thinking, and using objects, but these can be left aside for a while – to be returned to later for a fuller analysis – while we concentrate first and foremost on language.

I will introduce the idea of social languages through an initial discussion of how *whos* and *whats* are communicated in language (keeping in mind that language alone is rarely enough and is always put together with “other stuff” to pull off a Discourse). Let me give an example to make my points about *whos-doing-whats* via language-in-use more concrete. Consider, then, the warning on my aspirin bottle (Gee 1996), reprinted in Box 4.1 (italics and capitals are on the warning).

Box 4.1 Warning on an aspirin bottle

Warnings: Children and teenagers should not use this medication for chicken pox or flu symptoms before a doctor is consulted about Reye syndrome, a rare but serious illness reported to be associated with aspirin. Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. In case of accidental overdose, seek professional assistance or contact a poison control center immediately. As with any drug, if you are pregnant or nursing a baby, seek the advice of a health professional before using this product. IT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT NOT TO USE ASPIRIN DURING THE LAST 3 MONTHS OF PREGNANCY UNLESS SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED TO DO SO BY A DOCTOR BECAUSE IT MAY CAUSE PROBLEMS IN THE UNBORN CHILD OR COMPLICATIONS DURING DELIVERY. See carton for arthritis use⁺ and Important Notice.

My interpretation of this text is that there are two *who-doing-whats* in this warning, and they are interwoven. That is, there are two different answers to the question “Who is speaking to us?” and two corresponding answers to the question “What are they trying to do?” The first *who/what* combination is made up of the following sentences:

Children and teenagers should not use this medication for chicken pox or flu symptoms before a doctor is consulted about Reye syndrome, a rare but serious illness reported to be associated with aspirin. It is especially important not to use aspirin during the last 3 months of pregnancy unless specifically directed to do so by a doctor because it may cause problems in the unborn child or complications during delivery.

Here things are referred to quite specifically (“children or teenagers,” “this medication,” “chicken pox,” “flu,” “Reye syndrome,” “aspirin,” “last 3 months,” “unborn child,” “delivery”), doctors are called “doctor,” and matters are treated emphatically (italics, capitals, “should not,” “rare but serious,” “especially important,” “specifically directed”). We will see that this language enacts a one type of *who* seeking to accomplish one type of *what*.

The second *who-doing-what* combination is made up of the following sentences, placed in the middle of the other two:

Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. In case of accidental overdose, seek professional assistance or contact a poison control center immediately. As with any drug, if you are pregnant or nursing a baby, seek the advice of a health professional before using this product.