

AN INTRODUCTION  
TO CRITICAL DISCOURSE  
ANALYSIS IN EDUCATION

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## Semiotic Aspects of Social Transformation and Learning

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### CENTRAL CONCEPTS

A common critique of CDA is that it has not often attended to matters of learning. Learning, in this chapter, is addressed as a performativity of texts—both spoken and written. Social practices such as teaching and learning are mediated by structures and events and are networked in particular ways through orders of discourse. Orders of discourse are comprised of genres, discourses, and styles or “ways of interacting,” “ways of representing,” and “ways of being.”

This chapter theoretically reflects on semiotic aspects of social transformation and learning. Its particular focus is one gap in my work in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which a number of contributors in this volume have pointed out: It has not addressed questions of learning. So my objective is to incorporate a view of learning into the version of CDA that has been developing in my more recent work (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003; Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, 2003). I approach the question of learning indirectly in terms of the more general and in a sense more fundamental question of the *performativity* of texts or, in critical realist terms (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, forthcoming), their causal effects on nonsemiotic elements of the material, social, and mental worlds and the conditions of possibility for the performativity of texts. I use the term *semiosis* rather than *discourse* to refer in a

general way to language and other semiotic modes such as visual image, and the term *text* for semiotic elements of social events, be they written, spoken, or combine different semiotic modes as in the case of TV texts.

### SEMIOTIC ASPECTS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES, SOCIAL PRACTICES, AND SOCIAL EVENTS

Let me begin with the question of social ontology. I assume that both (abstract) social structures and (concrete) social events are real parts of the social world that have to be analyzed separately as well as in terms of their relation to each other—a position of analytical dualism (Archer, 1995, 2000; Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, forthcoming).

Social structures are abstract entities. One can think of a social structure (such as an economic structure, a social class or kinship system, or a language) as defining a potential—a set of possibilities. However, the relationship between what is structurally possible and what actually happens, between structures and events, is a complex one. Events are not in any simple or direct way the effects of abstract social structures. Their relationship is mediated—there are intermediate organizational entities between structures and events. Let us call these *social practices*. Examples would be practices of teaching and practices of management in educational institutions. Social practices can be thought of as ways to control the selection of certain structural possibilities and the exclusion of others, and the retention of these selections over time in particular areas of social life. Social practices are networked together in particular and shifting ways. For instance, there has recently been a shift in the way in which practices of teaching and research are networked together with practices of management in institutions of higher education—a *managerialization* (or more generally *marketization*; Fairclough, 1993) of higher education. Semiosis is an element of the social at all levels. Schematically:

Social structures: languages  
Social practices: orders of discourse  
Social events: texts

Languages can be regarded as among the abstract social structures to which I refer here. A language defines a certain potential, certain possibilities, and excludes others—certain ways of combining linguistic elements are possible, others are not (e.g., *the book* is possible as a phrase in English, *book the* is not). Yet texts as elements of social events are not simply the effects of the potentials defined by languages. We need to recognize intermediate organizational entities of a specifically linguistic sort—the linguistic

elements of networks of social practices. I call these *orders of discourse* (see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992). An order of discourse is a network of social practices in its language aspect. The elements of orders of discourse are not things like nouns and sentences (elements of linguistic structures), but discourses, genres, and styles (I differentiate them shortly). These elements, and particular combinations or articulations of these elements, select certain possibilities defined by languages and exclude others—they control linguistic variability for particular areas of social life. Thus, orders of discourse can be seen as the social organization and control of linguistic variation.

There is a further point to make: As we move from abstract structures toward concrete events, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate language from other social elements. In the terminology of Althusser, language becomes increasingly *overdetermined* by other social elements. At the level of abstract structures, we can talk more or less exclusively about language—more or less because *functional* theories of language see even the grammars of languages as socially shaped (Halliday, 1978). The way I defined orders of discourse makes it clear that at this intermediate level we are dealing with a much greater overdetermination of language by other social elements—orders of discourse are the social organization and control of linguistic variation, and their elements (discourses, genres, styles) are correspondingly not purely linguistic categories, but categories that cut across the division between language and nonlanguage, semiosis and the nonsemiotic. When we come to texts as elements of social events, the overdetermination of language by other social elements becomes massive: Texts are not just effects of linguistic structures and orders of discourse, they are also effects of other social structures and of social practices in all their aspects, so it becomes difficult to separate out the factors shaping texts.

### SEMIOSIS AS AN ELEMENT OF SOCIAL PRACTICES: GENRES, DISCOURSES, AND STYLES

Social events and, at a more abstract level, social practices can be seen as articulations of different types of social elements. They articulate semiosis (hence language) together with other nonsemiotic social elements. We might see any social practice as an articulation of the following elements:

Action and interaction  
Social relations  
Persons (with beliefs, attitudes, histories, etc.)  
The material world  
Semiosis

For instance, classroom teaching articulates together particular ways of using language (on the part of both teachers and learners) with particular forms of action and interaction, the social relations and persons of the classroom, and the structuring and use of the classroom as a physical space.

We can say that semiosis figures in three main ways in social practices:

Genres (ways of acting)

Discourses (ways of representing)

Styles (ways of being)

One way of acting and interacting is through speaking or writing, so semiosis figures first as part of the action. We can distinguish different genres as different ways of (inter)acting discursively—interviewing is a genre, for example. Second, semiosis figures in the representations, which are always a part of social practices—representations of the material world, of other social practices, reflexive self-representations of the practice in question. Representation is clearly a semiotic matter, and we can distinguish different discourses, which may represent the same area of the world from different perspectives or positions. An example of a discourse in the latter sense would be the political discourse of New Labour, as opposed to the political discourse old Labour, or the political discourse of Thatcherism (Fairclough, 2000b). Third and finally, semiosis figures alongside bodily behavior in constituting particular ways of being, particular social or personal identities. I call the semiotic aspect of this a *style*. An example would be the style of a particular type of manager—the way a particular type of manager uses language as a resource for self-identifying. Genres, discourses, and styles are realized in features of textual meaning and form, and we can distinguish three main aspects of textual meanings and their formal realizations (similar to the macrofunctions distinguished by Halliday, 1994) corresponding to them: actional, representational, and identificational meanings. These meanings are always simultaneously in play in texts and parts of texts.

### *Reflection and Action*

Using Fairclough's definitions of genre, discourse, and style or "ways of interacting," "ways of representing," and "ways of being," code a classroom interaction. What are the possible configurations of discourse practices in this event? Consult Fairclough's (1992) *Discourse in Social Change*. In chapter 8, Fairclough outlines the particular aspects of grammar to analyze when conducting a CDA. What aspects of grammar would fall under the category of *genre, discourse, or style*?

### SOCIAL EFFECTS OF TEXTS AND ON TEXTS

I have begun to discuss the causal effects of social structures and social practices on texts. We can see texts as shaped by two sets of causal powers and by the tension between them: on the one hand, social structures and social practices; and on the other hand, the agency of people involved in the events of which they are a part. Texts are the situated interactional accomplishments of social agents whose agency is enabled and constrained by social structures and social practices. Neither a broadly interactional perspective nor a broadly structural perspective (the latter now including social practices) on texts can be dispensed with, but neither is sufficient without the other.

We also have to recognize that texts are involved in processes of meaning making and that texts have causal effects (i.e., they bring about changes) that are mediated by meaning making. Most immediately, texts can bring about changes in our knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, experience, and so forth. We learn from our involvement with and in texts, and texturing (the process of making texts as a facet of social action and interaction) is integral to learning. Yet texts also have causal effects of a less immediate sort—for instance, one might argue that prolonged experience of advertising and other commercial texts contributes to shaping people's identities as consumers or their gender identities. Texts can also have a range of other social, political, and material effects—texts can start wars, for instance, or contribute to changes in economic processes and structures, or in the shape of cities. In summary, texts have causal effects on, and contribute to changes in, persons (beliefs, attitudes, etc.), actions, social relations, and the material world.

We need to be clear what sort of causality this is. It is not a simple mechanical causality—we cannot, for instance, claim that particular features of texts automatically bring about particular changes in people's knowledge or behavior or particular social, political, or material effects. Nor is causality the same as regularity: There may be no regular cause-effect pattern associated with a particular type of text or particular features of texts, but that does not mean that there are no causal effects.<sup>1</sup> Texts can have causal effects without them necessarily being regular effects because many other factors in the context determine whether particular texts as parts of particular events actually have such effects, and this can lead to a particular text having a variety of effects.

Contemporary social science has been widely influenced by social constructivism—the claim that the (social) world is socially constructed.

<sup>1</sup>The reduction of causality to regularity is only one view of causality—what is often referred to as *Humean causality*, the view of causality associated with the philosopher David Hume (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, 2003; Sayer, 2000).

Many theories of social constructivism emphasize the role of texts (language, discourse, semiosis) in the construction of the social world. These theories tend to be idealist rather than realist. A realist would argue that, although aspects of the social world such as social institutions are ultimately socially constructed, once constructed they are realities that affect and limit the textual (or discursive) construction of the social. We need to distinguish *construction* from *construal*, which social constructivists often do not: We may textually construe (represent, imagine, etc.) the social world in particular ways, but whether our representations or construals have the effect of changing its construction depends on various contextual factors, including the way social reality already is, who is construing it, and so forth. So we can accept a moderate version of the claim that the social world is textually constructed, but not an extreme version (Sayer, 2000).

One of the causal effects of texts that has been of major concern for Critical Discourse Analysis is ideological effects—the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining ideologies. I see ideologies as primarily representations of aspects of the world that can be shown to contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination, and exploitation—*primarily* because such representations can be enacted in ways of interacting socially and inculcated in ways of being in people's identities. Let us take an example: the pervasive claim that in the new global economy countries must be highly competitive to survive (something like this is presupposed in this extract from a speech by Tony Blair to the Confederation of British Industry: "Competition on quality can't be done by Government alone. The whole nation must put its shoulder to the wheel"). One could see such claims (and the neoliberal discourse with which they are associated) as enacted in new, more businesslike ways of administering organizations like universities and inculcated in new managerial styles. We can only arrive at a judgment about whether such claims are ideological by looking at the causal effects they have in particular areas of social life—for instance, factories or universities, asking whether they contribute to sustaining power relations (e.g., by making employees more amenable to managers' demands).

### DIALECTICAL RELATIONS

The relations between elements of a social event or social practice, including the relation between semiosis and nonsemiotic elements, are dialectical relations. We can say that elements are different, cannot be reduced to another, require separate sorts of analysis, and yet are not discrete. In Harvey's (1996) terms, each element internalizes other elements. What I said earlier about overdetermination can be seen in terms of the internalization of nonsemiotic elements in semiotic elements (texts, orders of discourse).

What I said about the causal effects of texts can be seen in terms of the internalization of semiotic elements in nonsemiotic elements.

We can see claims about the socially constructive effects of semiosis, including the moderate social constructivism advocated earlier, as presupposing the dialectical internalization of semiosis in the nonsemiotic—presupposing, for instance, that discourses can be materialized (internalized within the material world) in the design of urban spaces. We can also see claims about how people learn in the course of communicative interaction (such as the claims in the chapters of this volume) as presupposing the dialectical internalization of semiosis in the nonsemiotic. What people learn in and through text and talk, in and through the process of texturing as we might put it (making text and talk within making meaning), is not merely (new) ways of texturing, but also new ways of acting, relating, being, and intervening in the material world, which are not purely semiotic in character. A theory of individual or organizational learning needs to address the questions of retention—of the capacity to recontextualize what is learned, to enact it, inculcate it, and materialize it.

Dialectical relations obtain intrasemiotically as well as between semiotic and nonsemiotic elements. For instance, processes of organizational learning often begin (and especially so in what has been conceived of as the contemporary *information society* or *knowledge society*) with the recontextualization within organizations of discourses from outside—an obvious example these days is the discourse of new public management (Salskov-Iversen et al., 2000). Yet such discourses may (the modality is important in view of the moderate version of social constructivism advocated before) be enacted as new ways of acting and interacting, inculcated as new ways of being, as well as materialized in for instance new buildings and plants. Enactment is both semiotic and nonsemiotic: The discourse of new public management may be enacted as new management procedures, which semiotically include new genres (e.g., new ways of conducting meetings within an organization). Inculcation is also both semiotic and nonsemiotic: The discourse of new public management may be inculcated in new managers, new types of leaders, which is partly a matter of new styles (hence partly semiotic), but also partly a matter of new forms of embodiment. Bodily dispositions are open to semioticization (as indeed are buildings), but that does not mean they have a purely semiotic character—it is precisely a facet of the dialectical internalization of the semiotic in the nonsemiotic. What this example (and the case study by Salskov-Iversen et al.) also points to is the dialectic between colonization and appropriation in processes of social transformation and learning: Recontextualizing the new discourse is both opening an organization (and its individual members) up to a process of colonization (and to ideological effects) and, insofar as the new discourse is transformed, in locally specific

ways by being worked into a distinctive relation with other (existing) discourses—a process of appropriation.

Let us come back to the modality of the claim that discourses may be enacted, inculcated, and materialized. There are social conditions of possibility for social transformation and learning, which are in part semiotic conditions of possibility (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer, 2003). In the example of new public management discourse, for instance, the semiotic conditions of possibility for the recontextualization and dialectical enactment, inculcation, and materialization of the discourse within particular organizations refer to the order of discourse: the configuration of discourses, genres, and styles, which is in place not only within a particular organization, but in the social field within which it is located and the relations between the orders of discourse of different fields. To cut through the complexities involved here, we can say broadly that the openness of an organization to transformations led by a new discourse, and the openness of the organization and its members to learning, depend on the extent to which there is a discourse or configuration of discourses in place within the organization and the field for which the dialectic of enactment, inculcation, and materialization is fully carried through, and the capacity for autonomy with respect to other fields (not, of course, a purely semiotic matter).

## EMERGENCE AND LEARNING

The CDA of texts includes both interdiscursive analysis of the genres, discourses, and styles drawn on and how different genres, discourses, and styles are articulated together (textured together), and analysis of how such mixes of genres, discourses, and styles are realized in the meanings and forms of texts (which entails linguistic analysis and other forms of semiotic analysis, such as analysis of visual images or body language). The chapters in this volume by Rogers (chap. 3) and Lewis and Ketter (chap. 6), for instance, point to the significance in talk of interdiscursivity, discourse hybridity, for learning. In the critical realist frame I have been drawing on, one can see this as the basis for semiotic emergence, the making of new meanings. Yet as Lewis and Ketter (chap. 6) indicate, the possibilities for emergence depend on the relative dialogicality of text and talk—the orientation to difference. We can schematically differentiate five orientations to difference, with the proviso that this is not a typology of texts—individual texts and talk may combine them in various ways (Fairclough, 2003):

- (a) an openness to, acceptance of, and recognition of difference; an exploration of difference, as in dialogue in the richest sense of the term

- (b) an accentuation of difference, conflict, and polemic—a struggle over meaning, norms, and power
- (c) an attempt to resolve or overcome difference
- (d) a bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity
- (e) consensus, a normalization and acceptance of differences of power, which brackets or suppresses differences of meaning and over norms

Scenario (e) in particular is inimical to emergence. Dialogicality and orientation to difference depend on the sort of broadly structural conditions I pointed to in the previous section—conditions to do with social practices, fields, and relations between fields, which have a partly semiotic character (in terms of orders of discourse). However, as suggested earlier, the causal powers that shape texts are the powers of agency as well as of structure—whatever the state of the field and the relations between fields, we can ask about both latitudes for agency and their differential uptake by different agents, including agents involved in the sort of critical educational research reflected in the chapters of this volume.

A relatively high degree of dialogicality and orientation to difference can be seen as favoring the emergence of meaning through interdiscursive hybridity, although to talk about learning there needs to be some evidence of continuity and development (provided by longitudinal aspects of the research reported in this book) and retention (which one might see as requiring evidence of transfer and recontextualization, from one context to others). Learning can be seen as a form of social transformation in itself, but as a necessary but insufficient condition of social transformation on a broader scale. Learning through text and talk can be interpreted as part of what I referred to earlier as the semiotic conditions for social transformation.

## CRITICAL RESEARCH, LEARNING, AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

In assessing the possibilities for and limitations of critical educational research motivated by emancipatory (e.g., antiracist) agendas for learning and social transformation, one needs to consider both factors of a broadly structural character and factors to do with agency. With respect to the former, educational research can be seen as part of a network of social practices that constitutes an apparatus of governance (in part semiotically constituted as an order of discourse; Fairclough, 2003)—a network that includes practices of classroom teaching, educational management, educational research, and (national, state, local, etc.), government, and policy

making (Bernstein, 1990). The nature and workings of the apparatus are internally as well as externally contested—critical educational researchers are, for instance, often seeking to create more open and equal relations between academic research and classroom teaching. One issue they must consider is what I referred to earlier as the social conditions of possibility for social transformation and learning, which include latitudes for agency within educational research. These issues can be partly addressed from a semiotic perspective in terms of latitudes for agents in social research to develop, recontextualize, and seek to enact and inculcate new discourses. But there are also considerations to do with forms of agency in recontextualizing contexts (e.g., questions of the dialogicality of interactions between educational researchers and teachers). Once again neither a structural nor an interactional perspective can be dispensed with, but neither is sufficient without the other.

### *Reflection and Action*

In educational research, the researcher is often a member of the social practices he or she is studying or have a history of participation within the social practice. Given that we as researchers are often implicated into the practices we study, how do we uncover the networks of discourse patterns that might be natural or invisible to us as researchers?

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