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Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, *University of Florida, USA*

An Introduction to Discourse Analysis Theory and method

Third Edition

James Paul Gee

In the end, in the research from which this data came, the hypotheses we have begun to formulate here were richly supported by more and more data as the project went on. These hypotheses, in turn, helped discourse researchers understand how and why the project, at various points, was failing and allowed them to help make things work a bit better. Could they make it “perfect”? Of course not. Some of the problems and issues (largely to do with status, power, and institutional conflicts) our hypotheses point to are entrenched problems in the real world and would require substantive social and institutional changes to remove. But that doesn’t mean we can’t do anything and it doesn’t mean we can’t start on the process of institutional change.

In Chapter 8, I will elaborate further on the seven “building tasks” I have introduced here and their relevance for discourse analysis. But in the next four chapters, I want to develop several “tools of inquiry.” These are ways of looking at language-in-use that will help us study how the building tasks are carried out and with what social and political consequences.

Readings

- Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words*. Second Edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [A classic philosophical work on how language is as much about doing as saying and that, in fact, saying is a form of doing.]
- Hanks, W. F. (1995). *Language and communicative practices*. New York: Westview. [A wonderful and deep book on language as practice—we will discuss this book in a later chapter.]
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [The classic book on “speech acts”]

CHAPTER THREE

Tools of Inquiry and Discourses

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Tools

In the last chapter we looked at seven “building tasks,” seven areas or things that we use language to enact or build in the world. 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 practices and recognize identities and practices 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:

- a) **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.

- b) **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 also 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 (where 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.

- c) **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 they allude or relate 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” that 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 themselves 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) 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.

- d) **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 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.

Discourses: *Whos* and *Whats*

Let's start by trying to get at the notion of a "big D" Discourse. A Discourse is a characteristic way of saying, doing, and being. 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 practice or activity. 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 practices or activities (different "games"). The fact that people have differential access to different identities and practices, 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 the 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* (see Wieder & Pratt 1990). 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 practice or activity* that the utterance helps to constitute. Such identities and practices 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 the President.

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*.

"Real Indians"

Though I have focused on language, thus far, it is important to see that making visible and recognizable *who* (identity) we are and *what* (practice) 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 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" (p. 48—all page references are to Wieder & Pratt 1990). 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 scare 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.

Being a "real Indian" is not something one can simply be. Rather, it is 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 into 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-and-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-and-becoming-a-"real-Indian." Being a "real Indian" also requires appropriate accompanying objects (props), times, and places.

There are many ways one can do being-and-becoming-a-"real-Indian." Some of these are (following Wieder and Pratt): "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 amenities 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 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 monologue, 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 continuously, in practice, as part and parcel of shared histories and ongoing activities.

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 U.S.), 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 it to do and be an Athabaskan is in large part mutually exclusive with what it is required to do and be a writer of school-based essayist prose. This doesn't mean 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.

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 engaging in this sparring (which "Indians" call "razzing"), participants establish their cultural competency to and for each 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." Think of about how someone gets recognized as a "good student," a "good cook," a "gang member," a "competent lawyer," a "real basketball fan," or a "real Catholic." These all involve acting-interacting-thinking-valuing-talking-(sometimes writing-reading) in the "appropriate way" with the "appropriate" props at the "appropriate" times in the "appropriate" places.

"Good cooks" cannot just talk a good game. They have to be able to use recipes, utensils, and ingredients in a sort of "dance" of coordinating everything together. They also have to value certain things (e.g., presentation of food, combinations of tastes, pairings of food and wine) in certain ways.

How do we know a young child is becoming part of a literate Discourse (being-doing literacy of a certain sort)? We test that the child can turn a book right side up, knows what books are for, can interact with a parent appropriately while being read too, can engage in pretend book readings (i.e., "talk like a book"), and values books enough not to tear them apart. We test all this before a child can actually decode print (it is all part of what we call "emergent literacy," by which we mean a child is emerging into a "literate" sort of person).

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." 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 being 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. Discourses are about being different "kinds of people."

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" like 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 U.S. 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 L.A. 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 that the experimental physicists "know" is, in large part, *not* in their heads. Rather, it is spread out (distributed), inscribed in (and often trapped in) scientific apparatus, symbolic systems, books, papers, and journals, institutions, habits of bodies, routines of practice, and other people. 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 and in relation to tools, technologies, symbols, texts, and the objects they study in the world. 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 "know-how" 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 Latour 2005), such as particular forms of language, other people, objects (e.g., scientific equipment, atoms, molecules, or birds), places (e.g., labs 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.

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 in which a projector can freeze a piece of film. To make sense of that moment, you have to recognize the identities and practices (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 are not sure. You and I even argue about the matter. You say that "It's a skinhead sending intimidating glances to a passing adult on the street" and I say, "No, it's 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 practices (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 ("show and tell") 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 boundaries of Discourses. You, an African-American male, speak and act here and now in an attempt to get recognized as a "business manager coaching a project team." If you get recognized as such, then your performance is in the Discourse of business 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 business 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 my esteemed friends and 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 interleaved, 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.

Let me make several other brief, but 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, many years ago now, 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, some years ago, in Palmdale, California (a desert community outside Los Angeles), and I assume other places, as well, an anti-racist skinhead Discourse was dying out because people, including the police, tended 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, different ways of being and doing at each 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 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.
9. 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 we humans do to get ourselves and things recognized in certain ways and not others. They are also the "maps" in our heads by which we understand society. Discourses, then, are social practices and mental entities, as well as material realities.

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, clothes, 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 "fetal 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.

Note

The term "Discourse" (with a big "D") is meant to cover important aspects of what others have called: discourses (Foucault 1966); communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991); cultural communities (Clark 1996); discourse communities (Bizzell 1992); distributed knowledge or distributed systems (Hutchins 1995); thought collectives (Fleck 1979); practices (Bourdieu 1990); cultures (Geertz 1973); activity systems (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki 1999); actor-actant networks (Latour 2005), collectives (Latour 2004); 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) characteristic 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." 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.

Readings

- Bizzell, P. (1992). *Academic discourse and critical consciousness*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. [Excellent book in the field of "Composition and Rhetoric"]
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. [Most accessible of Bourdieu's books—a major theorist on the role of practice in creating "status" in society]
- Clark, H. H. (1996). *Using language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Excellent discussion of the social aspects of language from a psychological perspective]
- Engeström, Y., Miettinen, R. & Punamäki, R.-L., Eds. (1999). *Perspectives on activity theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [Engeström is the leading theorist in "activity theory" today]
- Fleck, L. (1979 [1935]). *The genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [A little-known but classic "must read" book—best thing ever written on the social nature of thought]
- Foucault, M. (1966). *The order of things: An archaeology of human sciences*. New York: Random House. [Foucault was the major theorist of how diverse aspects of a society and its institutions can at times represent similar values and themes]
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretations of cultures*. New York: Basic Books. [The leading work on culture by the twentieth century's outstanding anthropologist]
- Hacking, I. (1986). Making up people, in T. C. Heller, M. Sosa, & D. E. Wellbery, with A. I. Davidson, A. Swidler, & I. Watt, Eds. *Reconstructing individualism: Autonomy, individuality, and the self in Western thought*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 222–236. [Hacking's work on how different periods of history make being different "kinds of people" possible or impossible is deep and deeply important]
- Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [A brilliant book on how thinking is accomplished through tools and collaboration]