

The field of literacy studies has expanded considerably in recent years and new, more anthropological and cross-cultural frameworks have been developed to replace those of a previous era, in which psychological and culturally narrow approaches predominated (as they arguably still do in much educational and development literature). Where, for instance, educationalists and psychologists have focused on discrete elements of reading and writing skills, anthropologists and sociolinguists concentrate on literacies—the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing. The rich cultural variation in these practices and conceptions leads us to rethink what we mean by them and to be wary of assuming a single literacy where we may simply be imposing assumptions derived from our own cultural practice onto other people's literacies. Research in cultures that have newly acquired reading and writing draws our attention to the creative and original ways in which people transform literacy to their own cultural concerns and interests. Research into the role of literacies in the construction of ethnicity, gender, and religious identities makes us wary of accepting the uniform model of literacy that tends to be purveyed with the modern nation-state: the relationship of literacy and nationalism is itself in need of research at a time when the dominant or standard model of literacy frequently subserves the interests of national politics. Research into "vernacular" literacies within modern urban settings has begun to show the richness and diversity of literacy practices and meanings despite the pressures for uniformity exerted by the nation-state and modern education systems. . . .

. . . An understanding of literacy requires detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings. It is not sufficient, however, to extol simply the richness and variety of literacy practices made accessible through such ethnographic detail: we also need bold theoretical models that recognise the central role of power relations in literacy practices. I elaborate below on the ideological model of literacy that, I suggest, enables us to focus

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on the ways in which the apparent neutrality of literacy practices disguises their significance for the distribution of power in society and for authority relations: the acquisition, use, and meanings of different literacies have an ideological character that has not been sufficiently recognised until recently.

THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES

During the early 1980s there appeared a number of collections of academic papers that claimed to represent the relationship between literacy and orality as a "continuum" rather than, as in much of the previous literature, as a "divide" (see Coulmas and Ehlich 1983; Frawley 1982; Nystrand 1982; Taunen 1982; Wagner 1983; Whiteman 1981; Olson et al. 1985). It appeared that the differences between literate and oral channels of communication had been overstated in the past and that scholars were now more concerned with overlap, mix, and diverse functions in social context. A number of books appeared whose titles deliberately signaled this perspective: *The social construction of literacy* edited by J. Cook-Gumperz; *Literacy in social context* by K. Levine; *Literacy and society* edited by K. Schousboe and M. T. Larsen; *The logic of writing and the organisation of society* by J. Goody. I have argued that the supposed shift from "divide" to "continuum" was more rhetorical than real: that, in fact, many of the writers in this field continued to represent literacy as sufficiently different from orality in its social and cognitive consequences, that their findings scarcely differ from the classic concept of the "great divide" evident in Goody's earlier work (1977). This was to be explained by reference to the methodological and theoretical assumptions that underlay their work: in particular a narrow definition of social context; the reification of literacy in itself at the expense of recognition of its location in structures of power and ideology, related to assumptions about the "neutrality" of the object of study; and, from the point of view of linguistics, the restriction of "meaning" to the level of syntax. Besnier further points out that the concept of a "continuum" is inadequate because spoken and written activities and products do not in fact line up along a continuum but differ from one another in a complex, multidimensional way both within speech communities and across them. The criticism of "continuum" approaches is, therefore, even more fundamental than saying their proponents do not practice what they preach (Besnier 1988).

An alternative approach, which would avoid some of the problems generated by these assumptions begins with the distinction between "autonomous" and "ideological" models of literacy that I proposed some years ago (Street 1985) and that I would now like to clarify and extend in the light of subsequent comments and criticisms.

THE "AUTONOMOUS" MODEL OF LITERACY

The exponents of an "autonomous" model of literacy conceptualise literacy in technical terms, treating it as independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be

derived from its intrinsic character. The writers I characterise in this way do not necessarily themselves use the phrase "autonomous model of literacy" but I nevertheless found the term "model" useful to describe their perspective as it draws attention to the underlying coherence and relationship of ideas which on the surface might appear unconnected and haphazard. No one practitioner necessarily adopts all of the characteristics of the model, but the use of the concept helps us to see what is entailed by adopting particular positions, to fill in gaps left by untheorised statements about literacy and to adopt a broader perspective than is apparent in any one writer. The term autonomous itself appears in many of the authors I cite, and is closely linked in their minds with writing. Goody and Watt, for instance, in their seminal article to which much subsequent literature refers, maintain that writing is distinctive because it is, at least potentially, "an autonomous mode of communication" (in Goody 1968: 40). Walter Ong, probably the most influential writer on literacy in the United States, develops this idea more fully: "By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous and indifferent to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved in all else, somehow self-contained, complete" (1982: 132). David Olson has perhaps been the most explicit exponent of the "autonomous" model, arguing that "there is a transition from utterance to text both culturally and developmentally and that this transition can be described as one of increasing explicitness with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous and autonomous representation of meaning" (1977: 258). Where Goody has recently denied that his argument involves technological determinism or "autonomy" (see Goody 1986 and 1987, especially the preface), Olson holds enthusiastically to the strong version of the autonomous model, repeating in a recent article the claim that "the media of communication, including writing, do not simply extend the existing structures of knowledge; they alter it" (Olson 1988: 28). For him it is writing itself that has these major consequences: "writing did not simply extend the structure and uses of oral language and oral memory but altered the content and form in important ways." He represents the consequences of literacy not only in terms of social development and progress but also in terms of individual cognitive processes: "when writing began to serve the memory function, the mind could be redeployed to carry out more analytic activities such as examining contradictions and deriving logical implications. It is the availability of an explicit written record and its use for representing thought that impart to literacy its distinctive properties" (Olson 1988: 28). Hill and Parry (1994) note further extensions of this claim that literacy has distinctive, "autonomous" properties:

That text is autonomous is the basic premise of this model of literacy, but we have found the word "autonomous" used in other ways as well. Goody (1986), for example, applies it to both institutions and individuals. As an anthropologist, he is particularly interested in institutions and so it is to institutional autonomy that he generally refers. In writing about religion he claims, "Literate religions have some kind of au-

tonomous boundary. Practitioners are committed to one alone and may be defined by their attachment to a Holy Book, their recognition of a Credo, as well as by their practice of certain rituals, prayers, modes of propitiation. . . . Contrast the situation in societies without writing. You cannot practise Asante religion unless you are an Asante: and what is Asante religion now may be very different from Asante religion one hundred years ago."

(Goody 1986: 4-5; quoted in Hill and Parry, 1994)

Probst's analysis of the Aladura movement in western Nigeria . . . suggests, contra Goody, that literacy is not necessarily an autonomous factor in differences between local and central religions and that the distinction between oral and literate is overstated here as in other domains. For Probst . . . , the concept of an autonomous literacy is unhelpful with regard to both the social nature of literacy itself and to its relationship with other institutions. Goody, however, has recently extended the argument about the autonomy of literate religions to other kinds of organisation, to law, and bureaucracy: "writing has tended to promote the autonomy of organisations that developed their own modes of procedure, their own corpus of written tradition, their own special-ists and possibly their own system of support" (1986: 90) . . .

Hill and Parry also note Goody's extension of the concept of autonomy to the literate individual and cite his recent comments on the relationship between literacy and development: "If we take recent moves to expand the economies of countries of the Third World, a certain rate of literacy is often seen as necessary to radical change, partly from the limited standpoint of being able to read the instructions on the seed packet, partly because of the increased autonomy (even with regard to the seed packet) of the autodidact" (Goody 1986: 46). This idea frequently lies behind characterisations of literate individuals as more "modern," "cosmopolitan," "innovative," and "empathetic" than non-literates (Oxenham 1980: 15; Clammer 1976: 94; Lerner 1958). Lerner, for instance, interviewed some three hundred individuals in middle eastern countries and found that "those who rated high in empathy were also more likely to be literate, urban, mass media users and generally non-traditional in their orientations" (in Rogers 1969: 45). Literacy, then, has come to be associated with crude and often ethnocentric stereotypes of "other cultures" and represents a way of perpetuating the notion of a "great divide" between "modern" and "traditional" societies that is less acceptable when expressed in other terms. The recognition of these problems was a major impulse behind the development of an alternative model of literacy that could provide a more theoretically sound and ethnographic understanding of the actual significance of literacy practices in people's lives.

THE "IDEOLOGICAL" MODEL OF LITERACY

Researchers dissatisfied with the autonomous model of literacy and with the assumptions outlined above have come to view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognise the

variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts. Avoiding the reification of the autonomous model, they study these social practices rather than literacy-in-itself for their relationship to other aspects of social life. A number of researchers in the new literacy studies have also paid greater attention to the role of literacy practices in reproducing or challenging structures of power and domination. Their recognition of the ideological character of the processes of acquisition and of the meanings and uses of different literacies led me to characterise this approach as an "ideological" model (Street 1985).

I use the term "ideological" to describe this approach, rather than less contentious or loaded terms such as "cultural," "sociological," or "pragmatic" (see Hill and Parry 1988) because it signals quite explicitly that literacy practices are aspects not only of "culture" but also of power structures. The very emphasis on the "neutrality" and "autonomy" of literacy by writers such as Goody, Olson, and Ong is itself "ideological" in the sense of disguising this power dimension. Any ethnographic account of literacy will, by implication, attest its significance for power, authority, and social differentiation in terms of the author's own interpretation of these concepts. Since all approaches to literacy in practice will involve some such bias, it is better scholarship to admit to and expose the particular "ideological" framework being employed from the very beginning: it can then be opened to scrutiny, challenged, and refined in ways which are more difficult when the ideology remains hidden. This is to use the term "ideological" not in its old-fashioned Marxist (and current anti-Marxist) sense of "false consciousness" and simple-minded dogma, but rather in the sense employed within contemporary anthropology, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies, where ideology is the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other (Bourdieu 1976; Mace 1979; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1977; Asad 1980; Strathern 1985; Grillo 1989; Fairclough 1989; Thompson 1984). This tension operates through the medium of a variety of cultural practices, including particularly language and, of course, literacy. It is in this sense that it is important to approach the study of literacy in terms of an explicit "ideological" model.

Individual writers do not always employ the term to describe their own work, nor do they necessarily subscribe to all of the positions with which I associate the ideological model: but the use of the term "model" is a useful heuristic for drawing attention to a cluster of concepts and assumptions that have underlying coherence where on the surface they may appear disconnected. It helps us to see what is involved in adopting particular positions, to fill in gaps left by untheorised statements about literacy, and to adopt a broader perspective than is apparent in any one writer. Lewis, for instance, writing about the meanings and uses of literacy in Somalia and Ethiopia, does not employ the concept of an ideological model of literacy, but his work does fit with this new direction in literacy studies in a number of ways: he rejects the "great divide" between literacy and orality intrinsic to the autonomous model of literacy; he demonstrates the role of mixed literate and

oral modes of communication in local politics, in the assertion of identity, and in factional struggles; and he relates the particularities of local literacies to wider issues of nationalism and religion in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, Rockhill's account of the politics of literacy among Hispanic women in Los Angeles, with its focus on literacy as power, is implicitly located within the ideological model of literacy. She sees her research as demonstrating the multiple and contradictory ways in which ideology works. Women adopt new literacy genres that they hope will open up new worlds and identities and overcome their oppressive situations, but these genres also reproduce dominant gender stereotypes—for instance, of the magazine or TV secretary/receptionist. Their faith in the symbolic power of literacy and education represents a threat to their male partners and to traditional domestic authority relations: but it also represents a threat to the women themselves as they abandon local relations and networks to enter the alienating world of middle-class America. These complex examples, Rockhill argues, demonstrate that "the construction of literacy is embedded in the discursive practices and power relations of everyday life—it is socially constructed, materially produced, morally regulated and carries a symbolic significance which cannot be captured by its reduction to any one of these."

Reading through dense and theoretically sophisticated ethnographies of literacy such as this, it becomes apparent that literacy can no longer be addressed as a neutral technology, as in the reductionist "autonomous" model, but is already a social and ideological practice involving fundamental aspects of epistemology, power, and politics: the acquisition of literacy involves challenges to dominant discourses (Lewis), shifts in what constitutes the agenda of proper literacy (Weinstein-Shr; Carmetti; Shuman) and struggles for power and position (Rockhill, Probst). In this sense, then, literacy practices are saturated with ideology.

Some critics have taken the distinction between ideological and autonomous models to involve an unnecessary polarisation and would prefer a synthesis. However, I take the "ideological" model to provide such a synthesis, since it avoids the polarisation introduced by any attempt to separate out the "technical" features of literacy, as though the "cultural bits" could be added on later. It is those who have employed an "autonomous" model, and who have generally dominated the field of literacy studies until recently, who were responsible for setting up a false polarity between the "technical" and "cultural" aspects of literacy. The ideological model, on the other hand, does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense the "ideological" model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the "autonomous" model.

Other critics have objected that my resistance to the assumption of a "great divide" between literacy and orality has led me to underplay the real differences between these media. Miyoshi, for instance, claims that "by denying or underplaying the distinction between orality and literacy, Street

collapses the social variables into a single model of oral and literate mix, thereby licensing clearly against his intent the universalist reading of cultures and societies" (Miyoshi 1988: 17). . . . Challenging the great divide in favour of an oral/literate "mix" does not necessarily entail naive universalism: what I had in mind . . . is that the relation of oral and literate practices differs from one context to another. In that sense the unit of study is best not taken as either literacy or orality in isolation, since the values associated with either in our own culture tend to determine the boundaries between them.

Weinstein-Shr's comparison of the different literacies, or rather the different oral/literate mixes, of two Hmong refugees in Philadelphia brings out both the theoretical and methodological points involved here. She is concerned to demonstrate, like Kulick and Stroud, that newcomers to school literacy are not necessarily passive "victims" but take an active role in employing it as a "resource." The question that this forces us to ask is what precisely is the "resource" under consideration? It turns out not simply to be school literacy itself, but nor is it simply traditional "oral" skills. For one Hmong refugee in Philadelphia that resource begins from the uses and meanings of literacy constructed in an educational context (what we have referred to elsewhere as "pedagogised" literacy, Street and Street 1991), whilst for another it derives from cultural assumptions about the representation—in the form of scrap books, pictures, and text—of history and the role of great men. In the one case the oral/literate "resource" that a young man has acquired in school enables him to act as a broker between the host society and some of the Hmong around him; in the other the resource is derived from traditional cultural norms regarding authority and history, adapted through forms of literacy that are often at variance with that purveyed through formal classes. In this context it makes little sense to talk of "literacy," when what is involved are different literacies: and equally it makes little sense to compare the two subjects by distinguishing between their oral and literate practices when what is involved are different mixes of orality and literacy. The concept of oral/literate practices provides us with a unit of study that enables more precise cross-cultural comparison than when we attempt to compare literacy or orality in isolation. This is not quite the "universalism" that Miyoshi fears, although in the long run. . . . I would hope that we can begin to make some useful generalisations, of the kind Weinstein-Shr proposes in her conclusion, as data of this quality begin to amass.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS OF THE TWO MODELS OF LITERACY

The development of an alternative approach to literacy study during the 1980s, then, involving a move towards an ideological model, rejection of the great divide, and attention to an oral/literate mix has, I believe, opened up the possibility of different kinds of account than those which previously dominated the field. From the point of view of research, the autonomous model of literacy had generated two main strands of inquiry, one concerned with questions about the consequences of reading and writing for individual

and cognitive processes, the other considering the functional operation of literacy within specific modern institutions. Both approaches failed to pay sufficient attention to the social and ideological character of literacy. Educationists, linguists, and psychologists conceptualised literacy as a universal constant whose acquisition, once individual problems can be overcome by proper diagnosis and pedagogy, will lead to higher cognitive skills, to improved logical thinking, to critical inquiry, and to self-conscious reflection. The distinction of myth from history, of science from illusion, of democracy from autocracy, of elaborated from restricted code have all variously been attributed to such literacy as though it were a single, autonomous thing that had these consequences irrespective of context. Whilst anthropologists and folklorists (Finnegan 1989; Opland 1983; Parry 1989; Street 1987) have demonstrated that members of "oral" cultures—however defined—share all of the cognitive qualities attributed to literacy within the "autonomous" model, their attention to these questions in itself has meant that the study of literacy has remained embedded within the narrow confines of the debate about rationality, cognition, and relativism. Relativist anthropologists have argued that absence of literacy, whether for individuals or for societies, did not necessarily mean lack of critical thinking and so on, rehearsing the arguments of Levy-Bruhl and Evans-Pritchard, McIntyre and Winch, and, more recently, Lukes and Hollis about open and closed societies and minds, primitive and modern thought, bricoleurs and engineers (Bloch 1989; Street 1985). In doing so they accepted the terms of reference of the debate and focused the study of literacy narrowly, so that the potential for richer and broader analysis of the subject was understated.

Where the social context of literacy has been addressed, the premises of the "autonomous" model have directed attention away from its significance for power relations in specific social conditions. With regard to bureaucracy and the social organisation of the modern state, for instance, literacy has been seen as a "neutral" mechanism for achieving functional ends, a *sine qua non* of the state whatever its ideological character, a technology to be acquired by sufficient proportions of the population to ensure the mechanical functioning of its institutions (Gellner 1983; Goody 1986). Again the ideological character of the processes of acquisition and of the meanings and uses of literacy in specific cultural contexts have been understated: the "naturalisation" of ideologies, as though they were universal necessities rather than institutions for reproduction of the cultural and power bases of particular interests and groups, has been reinforced by the academic community as much as by those whose interests it serves.

In contrast, then, to the study of literacy as either an individual cognitive tool or as a neutral function of institutions, the conceptualisation of literacy as ideological practice opens up a potentially rich field of inquiry into the nature of culture and power, and the relationship of institutions and ideologies of communication in the contemporary world. For the discipline of anthropology, currently disillusioned with the frameworks and questions of the post-war era and looking to make some contribution to the analysis of

ideology and power in contemporary societies, there is much of interest here. For those working within sociolinguistics and concerned to address language in social context, in contrast with the reified and a-social models employed by formal linguists, the study of literacy practices in ethnographic context also opens up new research possibilities. It is no surprise, then, that the vast increase in collections of articles and books on literacy to which I referred at the outset have tended to come from these fields. I would now like to consider recent developments in linguistic and anthropological theory and methodology as providing the context from which . . . the ideological model of literacy [has] emerged.

LINGUISTICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY: DISCOURSE AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Within linguistics there has recently been a shift towards "discourse" analysis, which takes as the object of study larger units of language than the word or sentence (see Coulthard 1977; Stubbs 1985; Benson and Greaves 1985; van Dijk 1990). I would like to suggest that this trend towards "discourse" analysis in linguistics could fruitfully link with recent developments of the "ethnographic" approach within anthropology that take fuller account of theories of power and ideology. With respect to research in orality and literacy, this merging of disciplines and methodologies, within an "ideological" as opposed to an "autonomous" model of literacy, provides a means to replace the concept of the "great divide" with richer and less ethnocentric concepts. Some of the key terms in the new literacy studies derive from these approaches: the concepts of "literacy events" (Heath 1983), "literacy practices" (Street 1984), and "communicative practices" (Grillo 1989). I begin with a brief account of these terms before elaborating on the notion of "discourse" and of "context" within which they are situated.

Heath defines a "literary event" as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (Heath 1982). I employ "literacy practices" as a broader concept, pitched at a higher level of abstraction and referring to both behavior and conceptualisations related to the use of reading and/or writing. "Literacy practices" incorporate not only "literacy events," as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also "folk models" of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them (Street 1987). Grillo has extended this notion still further to the notion of "communicative practices" in general, which obviously owes much to Hymes' work on the "ethnography of communication" (Hymes 1974 and *passim*). Grillo construes the concept of "communicative practices" as including "the social activities through which language or communication is produced," "the way in which these activities are embedded in institutions, settings or domains which in turn are implicated in other, wider, social, economic, political and cultural processes," and "the ideologies, which may be linguistic or other, which guide processes of communicative production" (Grillo 1989: 15). For Grillo, then, "literacy is seen as one type of communicative practice," within this larger social con-

text, moving the emphasis away from attempts to attribute grand consequences to a particular medium or channel.

"CONTEXT" IN LINGUISTICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Central to development of this conceptual apparatus for the study of literacy is a re-evaluation of the importance of "context" in linguistic analysis. Sociolinguists, with some justification, have been reluctant to allow the floodwaters of "social context" to breach defences provided by the rigour and logic of their enterprise. They sense that such "context" is so unbounded and loose that it would swamp their own very precise and bounded studies. Within linguistics and its sub-disciplines, therefore, "context" has tended to be excluded altogether from consideration. Grillo, Pratt, and Street point out, in an article on "Anthropology and linguistics" that "although it is often stressed that language is, amongst other things, a social fact, the importance of this dimension is diminished by the way the levels of 'semantics' have been constructed, in particular the claim (made by Lyons, amongst others, 1981: 28) that word and sentence meaning are 'to a high degree context independent'" (cited in Grillo, Pratt, and Street 1987: 11). Even when they have paid attention to "social context," it has been in terms of a narrow definition. In sociolinguistics, for instance,

the term "social" tends to be reserved for personal interaction, whereas most anthropologists would want to emphasise that even the native speaker intuiting is a social being . . . (Furthermore) when in the analysis of utterance meaning, attention is turned to the social context, the main focus of enquiry has been pragmatics, doing things with words. This is undoubtedly an important area of enquiry, and at least one anthropologist (Bloch) has recently made extensive use of the concept of illocutionary force. However, this should not diminish the attention paid to social context in the analysis of the use of language to make propositions about the world, since this is also fundamentally a social process.

(Grillo, Pratt, and Street 1987: 11)

When they do turn to sociology, for instance in the analysis of "context," sociolinguists have tended to borrow mainly from "network" theory, or from Goffman-inspired "interactionism," which refers only to those aspects of "context" that are directly observable and to such immediate links between individuals as their "roles," obligations, "face-to-face encounters," and so on. In his recent book on pragmatics, for instance, Levinson explicitly and self-consciously excludes wider interpretations of "context" and admits: "a relatively narrow range of contextual factors and their linguistic correlates are considered here: context in this book includes only some of the basic parameters of the context of utterance, including participants' identity, role and location, assumptions about what participants know or take for granted, the place of an utterance within a sequence of turns at talking and so on" (1983: x). He does acknowledge the existence of wider interpretations of

"context": "We know, in fact, that there are a number of additional contextual parameters that are systematically related to linguistic organisation, particularly principles of social interaction of various sorts of both a culture-specific kind (see, for example, Keenan 1976) and universal kind (see, for example, Brown and Levinson 1978)." But he excludes them because his aim is to faithfully represent the philosophic-linguistic tradition in the United States and Britain, rather than, for instance that on the continent, where the tradition he notes is "altogether broader" (p. ix). (See also Dillon 1985 and Bailey 1985 for explorations of recent developments in post-Firrhian linguistics, particularly with regard to discourse analysis and pragmatics.)

I would like to argue that the analysis of the relationship between orality and literacy requires attention to the "wider parameters" of "context" largely underemphasised in Anglo-American linguistics. Within social anthropology, for instance, these would be taken to include the study of kinship organisation, conceptual systems, political structures, economic processes, and so on, rather than simply of "network" or "interaction." There is little point, according to this perspective, in attempting to make sense of a given utterance or discourse in terms only of its immediate "context of utterance," unless one knows the broader social and conceptual framework that gives it meaning. This involves not just "commonsense," but the development of theories and methods as rigorous as those employed in other domains. It is these theories and methods that provide some guarantee that attention to social context need not swamp or drown the precise aspects of language use selected for study within linguistics and its sub-disciplines.

It is to the broader meaning of the term "context," for instance, that Bledsoe and Robey refer when they argue . . . for understanding literacy in its "cultural context." In Sierra Leone writing is absorbed by Mende secret societies into a tradition of secrecy and exclusion, where hierarchies of access to knowledge maintain successive degrees of power and control over others. We cannot really claim to make sense of script produced within this framework if we attend only to the meaning of the "words on the page" and to the lexical devices for encoding meaning. These represent only one aspect, they argue, of the potential of writing: writing is used also as a means of establishing secrecy and maintaining control of, or as they put it "managing," knowledge. This is to be understood not simply in terms of the immediate context of utterance or production but of broader features of social and cultural life, such as the secret societies and their institutional control and definition of hierarchies of power.

"DISCOURSE" IN LINGUISTICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

In recent years the methods and theories employed by anthropologists to study social life in cross-cultural perspective have been subject to rigorous criticism. In contrast with the static, functionalist approach implied in, for instance, Malinowski's "context of situation," recent approaches within the discipline have emphasised the dynamic nature of social processes and the

broader structure of power relations. This has frequently taken the form of exploration of the concept of ideology and of "discourse" (see Asad 1980; Parkin 1985; Grillo et al. 1987; Grillo 1989; Bloch 1975; Agar 1986; Agar and Hobbs 1983; Strathern 1985; Fardon 1990). In this sense "discourse" refers to the complex of conceptions, classifications, and language use that characterise a specific sub-set of an ideological formation. For Sherzer discourse refers to "the nexus, the actual and concrete expression of the language-culture-society relationship. It is discourse which creates, recreates, modifies and fine-tunes both culture and language and their intersection" (Sherzer 1987: 296; quoted in Grillo 1989: 18). Grillo, as an anthropologist, wishes to stress that analysis "must always be concerned with the practice of discourse—*inter alia* the social activity through which discourse is produced and in which it is located." Asad employs the term as a means of challenging traditional static accounts of culture by his anthropological colleagues. He criticises accounts that assumed "an integrated set of cultural meanings," a "total culture," notions owing something to formal linguistic models. For him the crucial question is how a given discourse comes to define what is correct and what "meaningless." The definition of what is on the agenda, of which discourse is appropriate, is constructed, he asserts, out of specific political conditions "which make certain rhetorical forms objectively possible and authoritative" (Asad 1979). Social change involves challenging a given form of (dominant) discourse and the production and assertion of other discourses within new material conditions. He would like to use the concept of discourse, then, not at the level of abstract philosophical enquiry but in terms of the real social relations between historical forces and relations on the one hand and forms of discourse sustained or undermined by them on the other. Parkin sees the anthropologist's contribution as providing "detailed micro-historical cases of ideological discourse in action" (Parkin 1984: 28). His account at times almost merges with those of some sociolinguists: anthropologists, he claims, are showing "increasing interest in figurative speech": they "now examine forms of rhetoric, tropes and oratory for evidence of internal cultural debate." Anthropological usage, however, remains rather broader than within linguistics, where "discourse" frequently indicates simply chunks of language larger than the sentence. The boundaries between the senses of the term in the different disciplines remain unclear and can frequently overlap. Far from being a source of confusion, however, this ambiguity may be turned to constructive use, providing a means to pursue issues that are perhaps harder to grasp within the language and definitions of either discipline separately.

Travelling from a different direction from the anthropologists, sociolinguists such as Brown and Yule have recently arrived at a similar point: they are concerned to "link thickly described discourse to larger patterns of action and interaction" (quoted in Dillon 1985), to provide a method which can be more sensitive to language in use than traditional ethnography has been. Where the new anthropological interest in language as discourse needs to take some account of the detailed micro-linguistic studies available in

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sociolinguistics, Brown and Yule recognise the need for their sociolinguist colleagues to develop a linguistic theory that conceives of language as essentially a social process, and which takes full account of more sophisticated theories of discourse relations than simple interactionalism, network analysis or "commonsense." The methods employed by anthropologists do not on their own guarantee theoretical sophistication: it is possible, for instance, for "ethnographic" accounts of literacy to be conducted within the "autonomous" model, with all the problems and flaws that entails. However, when ethnographic method is allied to contemporary anthropological theory, emphasizing ideological and power processes and dynamic rather than static models, then it can be more sensitive to social context than either linguistics in general or discourse analysis in particular have tended to be.

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he Proteus-nature . . . of ever-shifting language

—JOHN UPTON, *CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON SHAKESPEARE*, 1747

Since the mid-1970s, anthropologists, linguists, historians, and psychologists have turned with new tools of analysis to the study of oral and literate societies. They have used discourse analysis, econometrics, theories of schemata and frames, and proposals of developmental performance to consider the possible links between oral and written language, and between literacy and its individual and societal consequences. Much of this research is predicated on a dichotomous view of oral and literate traditions, usually attributed to researchers active in the 1960s. Repeatedly, Goody and Watt (1963), Ong (1967), Goody (1968), and Havelock (1963) are cited as having suggested a dichotomous view of oral and literate societies and as having asserted certain cognitive, social, and linguistic effects of literacy on both the society and the individual. Survey research tracing the invention and diffusion of writing systems across numerous societies (Kroeber, 1948) and positing the effects of the spread of literacy on social and individual memory (Goody and Watt, 1963; Havelock, 1963, 1976) is cited as supporting a contrastive view of oral and literate social groups. Research which examined oral performance in particular groups is said to support the notion that as members of a society increasingly participate in literacy, they lose habits associated with the oral tradition (Lord, 1965).

The language of the oral tradition is held to suggest meaning without explicitly stating information (Lord, 1965). Certain discourse forms, such as the parable or proverb (Dodd, 1961), are formulaic uses of language which convey meanings without direct explication. Thus, truth lies in experience and is verified by the experience of listeners. Story plots are said to be interwoven with routine formulas and fixed sayings to make up much of the content of the story (Rosenberg, 1970). In contrast, language associated with the literate

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