Book reviews

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JOHN M. CONLEY AND WILLIAM M. O'BARR (1998) *Just Words: Law, Language and Power.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 168 pp. £10.50 (pbk); £27.95 (hbk)
SUSAN U. PHILIPS (1998) *Ideology in the Language of Judges: How Judges Practice Law, Politics and Courtroom Control.* Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics 17. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 205 pp. £24.99 (pbk)

Law is essentially a linguistic act. It is the discourse by which the state redefines everyday categories with pragmatic effects. Because legal language is an intersection of language and state power, it has become a key site for the study of social power in action, in which power can be studied not only as a reality in the making but as a reality being made through talk. In *Just Words*, Conley and O'Barr offer a useful and readable introduction to the vast and growing field of language and law studies.

While the book is basically a review of some of the primary literature in the language and law field, it is limited to those that focus on discourse, and in particular those studies that link the minutiae of speech as recorded in trial transcripts (or by the linguists themselves) with the pragmatic outcomes of the legal situation. The authors themselves make this clear in their introduction, where they advocate a meeting of sociolinguistic analysis of language variation with Foucaultian concerns over discourse as a locus of power.

The authors' choices of work to review reflect these concerns. One chapter is devoted to Matoesian's 1993 work on rape trials. Using 17 of his transcripts, the authors offer convincing evidence that 'the ordinary mechanisms of cross-examination' in the situation of a rape trial 'simultaneously reflects and reaffirm men's power over women'.

Another chapter focuses on recent work by several scholars on divorce mediation. Others examine cross-cultural studies of law and language, and studies of the history of law, through attention to the language of petitions and other verbal instruments.

Conley and O'Barr are not content to summarize, however. They are selective in the literature they represent, so that instead of choosing only those studies that apply the fine-grained methods of conversation analysis to legal discourses, they specifically explore their relevance to the study of how ideology and hegemony are constructed through discourse. This is particularly clear in a chapter in which they use their own work with small claims court disputes to question and modify the influential conceptual framework on disputing put forward by Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1980).

A recurrent theme throughout the work is a concern with the nature of patriarchy in law. Conley and O'Barr argue that such macrodiscourses as 'patriarchy' (and, presumably, 'Orientalism', 'racism' and so forth) must be investigated through the details of the microdiscourses that generate them. Contrasting the language of law with recent work on gendered patterns of discourse among Americans, Conley and O'Barr stand on its head the argument put forward by some feminist scholars that legal language translates patriarchy into social action. They argue instead that the patriarchy is produced in the practices of law by discourses that conflict with the regular linguistic practices of women. Patriarchy, in this view, does not structure the legal system and its discourses; rather, patriarchy is generated and reinscribed by legal practice since 'every time the law's linguistic practice is reenacted, the patriarchy of its macrodiscourse – that is, the way things are thought about and acted upon – is reaffirmed' (p. 74).

Susan Philips's *Ideology in the Language of Judges* is a superb example of the kinds of studies of law and language that Conley and O'Barr are calling for: the study of microdiscourse to reveal the ways ideologies are constituted and enacted in social practices rather than being considered as behavioral manifestations of mental phenomena or social structure. Focusing on judges as the most powerful agents in the courtroom, Philips pays close attention to the details of linguistic practice in that setting to uncover ideological struggles and link these to judges' differing interpretations of due process law and of their own proper roles in courtroom procedure.

The core of Philips's study is an investigation into the interpretive practices of judges as they apply written law in the courtroom. In her interviews, Philips draws out judges' views of their own roles in the courtroom, their recognitions (and denials) of the roles ideology plays in judicial appointments, their insistence that the role they perform in the courtroom is a non-ideological one of applying laws created by legislatures and appellate courts rather than an ideological one, and their view of their own practices as a matter of 'personal style'. She contrasts this with a detailed examination of court disputes – she focuses entirely on guilty pleas – to demonstrate that differences in judges' styles of courtroom control are linked to political ideologies.

Philips identifies two general styles into which her six judges can be divided: procedure-oriented judges, who involve the defendant in elaborating certain topics, and record-oriented judges, who believe that the written record does not require oral elaboration. There are unanswered questions in this work, for example, whether differences in defendant or defense attorney styles might correlate with judges' styles to affect pragmatic outcomes, but these are perhaps questions for another study.

Philips uses three kinds of discourse: interviews with judges, written law and spoken guilty pleas (particularly the latter – including the Appendix, nearly half the book consists of transcript). Particularly impressive, for those of us who have dealt with the American court system at one level or another, is Philips's ability to rely on her own tapes of courtroom proceedings rather than on court transcripts. Court reporting, with its emphasis on getting the words correct, ignores much of the detail that is the meat of conversation analysis and other micro-discursive studies: pauses, speaker overlaps, repairs and emphasis, among others. The permission to make tapes, granted to Philips by the Pima County (Arizona) superior court system and the judges involved, is a significant improvement, and will hopefully set a precedent.

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SVETLA CMERJKOVÁ, JANA HOFFMANOVÁ, OLGA MÜLLEROVÁ AND JINDRA SVETLA (EDS). *Dialoganalyse VI – Referate der 6. Arbeitstagung Prag 1996* (2 Vols) Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag. 1998. 558 pp. DM238; 473 pp. DM 208

These two volumes are full of interesting and stimulating information; with 106 articles on 1,031 pages. Most are in English (61), some in French (24) and 21 in German, and they represent the outcome of the Sixth Conference on Dialogue Analysis. Due to the wide range of interests subsumed under the label 'dialogue analysis', we find articles on classical rhetoric as well as on conversation analysis, institutional talk, and 'dialogue in opera'.

The meeting was organized into six sections, and the two volumes follow the same pattern, with each section introduced by one or more plenary article, as follows:

I. Rhetoric and Argumentation: The introductory articles are by Stati on text type, or 'argumentation' (*Le texte argumentatif*), and by Dascal on polermics.

Other articles in this section deal with types of argumentation, argumentation roles, functions, strategies and styles, means of persuasion and means of manipulation. There is also an introductory article by Weigand to a Round Table on 'Emotions in Dialogue'.

II. Semiotic aspects of Dialogue (Orality and Literacy, Non-verbal communication): This section, introduced by DuBartell's 'Methodological issues in Computer-mediated Discourse' includes articles about electronic dialogues and the consequences they have, or may have in the future, on our understanding of orality vs literacy (Violi). It also includes some articles by French contributors on non-verbal aspects of dialogue, such as gestures and posture.

III. Linguistic levels of Dialogue analysis: This section is introduced by an article on 'Salience in Dialogues' (Hajiova et al.), and includes papers on syntactic, semantic, pragmatic as well as phonetic aspects of dialogues. Among the topics discussed are 'Context and Dialogue' (Bazzanella), 'Focus and Implicature' (Bearth), 'The Use of Connectives in English' (Freddi), and 'Sound Qualities of Spoken Dialogue' (Palková).

IV. Dialogue and Institutions: The introductory article to this section on 'Conversation analysis and Institutional talk' is by Heritage. The types of interactions dealt with in this section include student–teacher, with an article by Ciliberti on 'Oral Examinations'; doctor–patient (e.g. Drew's paper on 'Out-of-hours Calls to the Doctor'), and Jörgensen's intercultural study of this type of interaction; police interrogations (especially Coulthard's article on 'Audience Manipulation in Police Records'), and court interrogation.

V. Footing in Dialogue (Dialogue, Politics, Mass Media): According to the editors this section could be seen as a subsection of that on institutional discourse, which may explain why it does not have an introductory article. It contains the outcome of a workshop on the concept of 'positioning'. Most of the articles deal with dialogues stigmatized by ethnic and racial conflicts, prejudices, and stereotypes, others thematize various aspects of dialogue in media. (cf. the interesting contribution by Bischl).

VI. Dialogue in Arts (Belle Lettres, Theatre, Film, Music): This section is introduced by an article about drama as a subject for dialogue analysis (Drama als Gegenstand der Dialoganalyse) by Hundsnurscher. Other articles deal with such topics as 'Signals of Argumentation in Dialogues by Kafka and Musil' (Rudolph), a 'Typology of Dialogic Structures in Literature' (Ionescu-Ruxandoiu), or 'The Hidden Dialogue of Music' (Doubravová).

This is a very interesting collection of articles, combining traditional topics and methodological approaches with new perspectives, and it provides a good insight into the 'diversified repertoire of dialogical topics' (xii). It is also extremely well edited: there are almost no misprints, and it includes a complete list of the participants, with their full addresses – but no e-mails.

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CAROL MYERS-SCOTTON (ED.), *Codes and Consequences: Choosing Linguistic Varieties.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 227 pp. £59 (hbk) Contributors: Amittai F. Aviram, Rusty Barrett, Janice Bernsten, Trevor Howard-Hill, Nancy Kreml, Margaret Mishoe, Carol Myers-Scotton, Mary Sue Sroda and Timothy Wilt.

This edited volume continues the line of inquiry delineated in Myers-Scotton (1993), providing a revised delineation of the Markedness Model (MM) and a rich exemplification of intralanguage code-switching (a.k.a. style-switching, e.g. choosing between styles, registers and/or dialects of a given language) in a variety of different contexts. The editor, who is also the original author of the MM, and an internationally-acclaimed authority on code-switching, acknowledges that the MM draws heavily on Grice's (1975) notion of *implicature* (which it terms *intentionality* instead) and on Sperber and Wilson's (1995) concept of *strong* and *weak* implicatures. Following an introduction and an overview of the MM, the chapters are organized according to three themes: 1) code-switching in literature; 2) code-switching in spoken English; and 3) code-switching and second-language acquisition.

An overview of the MM by the editor is provided in Chapter 2, delineating the key assumptions of the framework: 1) conversational interactants are rational actors; 2) conversational interactants innately possess a *markedness evaluator*, which allows each speaker to determine how marked a given utterance is, and what type of response is appropriate for marked utterances; 3) the settings within the markedness evaluator are interaction-specific, dynamic, and multidimensionally ordered; 4) successful communication involves more than merely decoding linguistic signals (i.e. it involves a global focus); 5) conversational interactants use code-switching to mark the set of rights and obligations which each party desires to be in force at a given moment in time; 6) the rights and obligations represent norms or 'codes of behavior that are established and maintained by the social group' (p. 24); and 7) after receiving specific readings from the markedness evaluator, speakers take five maxims into consideration when making code choices: the Unmarked Choice Maxim, the Marked Choice Maxim, the Exploratory Choice Maxim, the Deference Maxim and the Virtuosity Maxim.

In all, the section on code-switching in literature presents five studies, surveying code-switching phenomena in a variety of works, such as Biblical Hebrew narratives, *Romeo and Juliet, All the Pretty Horses, The Great Gatsby, As I Lay Dying,* and poems by Blake, Dickinson, and Stevens. The section on code-switching in spoken English contains three studies, focusing on code-switching in the speech of: 1) African-American drag queens (mostly from Texas); 2) white, lower-socioeconomic residents of North Carolina; and 3) workers in a mid-Michigan auto factory. The section on code-switching and second-language acquisition presents one study, which investigates marked and unmarked written responses to a data eliciation task involving four native speakers (NSs) and 13 non-native speakers (NNSs) of English enrolled in a one-semester, first-year composition class at the University of South Carolina.

All of the examples of code choice presented in this book involve intralanguage code-switching, reflecting the central concern of the editor to supplement her previous work on code-switching across languages (Myers-Scotton, 1988, 1993). To that extent, therefore, the argument that the MM model is applicable to intralanguage code-switching is convincing. However, the discussion on code-switching and second-language acquisition is much less developed (with only one study presented, and little space devoted to the complexities involved in determining markedness within NS–NNS discourse). *Codes and Consequences* provides a useful introduction to this field and is recommended for anyone interested in the sociopragmatics of code-switching, in particular, and the relationship between discourse and society, in general.

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BOB HODGE AND KAM LOUIE. *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture.* London and New York: Routledge, 1998. xiii + 182 pp. £16.99 (pbk); £50 (hbk)

The book begins with issues concerning its aim, and the approach the authors are to take. The aim, clearly stated, is 'to make it easier for a new generation of students in the West to understand China as it is and it is becoming' (p. 20). The approach, which is developed over seven chapters from a criticism of the narrow concerns of the conservative Sinologism, is culture-bound, though termed variously as social semiotics, discourse analysis, or cultural studies. Thus, in Chapter 2, one of the best stories written in the 1980s – Ah Cheng's 'Chess King' is analyzed with reference to such codes as verbal patterns, accent and dialect, and literary and artistic styles, which together form the notion of 'reading style'.

Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, center on the learning of Chinese characters, and the main features of Chinese grammar. Here the Chinese characters and grammar are processed and analyzed in a quite different way to traditional approaches. It is in these two chapters that Hodge and Louie develop their new theory, which they term the Chinese Ideology Machine. They explore the interdependence between language and ideology, and conclude that the Chinese language is highly ideological, to the point that Chinese language and ideology only make sense if ideology is partial, contradictory and incoherent, occurring not as a single structure but as a complex. They further explain that ideology serves two contradictory functions: to express the power of the powerful, and the difference from the non-powerful (the P-ideology); and to assure the solidarity of the non-powerful, and their identity of interests with the powerful (the S-ideology). They apply this theory to the analysis of many practical uses of the Chinese language, so that the characters *yin/yang,* for example, are considered as an ideological complex, 'where P-ideologies coexist with S-ideologies, and the S-forms function to mask, but not conceal, the dominance of the P-forms' (p. 52).

In Chapter 5, the authors analyze the ambiguity of discourses in a more technical way, for instance by reference to 'praising virtue' and 'lacking virtue' ('Ge de' yu 'que de'), the title of an article written by a Chinese writer. The ambiguity appears in that 'ge' and 'que' must have an agent, since they serve as verbs in the discourse. This agent has been transformationally deleted, and has to be guessed at to make sense of the phrase. This kind of transformation, however, is not the whole case. Semiotic transformations also create ambiguity. For example, the quotation marks enclosing the two phrases indicate that they are the view of a particular group, and that as a consequence their value should be evaluated according to the context or to the persons who speak them.

Here Hodge and Louie account for the discourse in terms of mimetics (representing the world) and semiotics (engaging in social acts of making meaning), which bear some traces of earlier accounts of discourses. For example, Brown and Yule differentiate 'nested context' from 'the context of situation' in their study of discourse (1983). Cook also describes two ways of approaching language: 'contextual', referring to facts outside language, and 'formal', referring to facts inside language (1989: 14). What Hodge and Louie contribute to the field of discourse studies, however, is their solution to the problem of ambiguity – the ambiguity of reference on the one hand, and, on the other, the ambiguity of ideological value. They develop a discursive strategy by which the 'tendency towards ambiguity' in the language is normally constrained and controlled by discursive rules, to give a set of interpretations that mesh with 'common sense' (p. 114).

With the last two chapters devoted to the ideological approach to two other issues in Chinese language and culture – gender and film – the book concludes with a number of texts that illustrate the theory of the Chinese Ideology Machine. However, some of the texts reveal a foreign influence in the authors' analysis of present-day China. In their reference to the 'Tiananmen Massacre', for example, they are obviously not using the form of words preferred by the Chinese government.

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KAREN HENWOOD, CHRISTINE GRIFFIN AND ANN PHOENIX (eds) *Standpoints and Differences: Essays in the Practice of Feminist Psychology.* London: Sage, 1998. x + 240 pp. £45.00 (hbk); £15.00 (pbk)

This book is from the same series as Wilkinson and Kitzinger's (1995) *Feminism and Discourse*, and includes chapters by many of the same authors (Burman, Gill, Squire, and Wetherell). Indeed, many of the papers are explicitly discursive in nature, developing many of the themes from that earlier volume.

The book as a whole addresses itself to (re)theorizing the relationship between feminist standpoint theory – the 'taking of an explicitly political agenda' (Willott) – and feminist poststructuralism – with its critique of the unitary subject, emphasis on difference and 'otherness', and 'epistemological destabilizations' (Burman, p. 210). Put simply, how can one theorize the oppression of women as a group *and* acknowledge the infinite diversity of women's experience?

Henwood et al. argue that presenting 'feminism(s) and poststructuralism(s) as two distinct perspectives is a gross, and in some cases, an inaccurate over-simplification' (p. 1). Instead, their aim is to recognize both the relevance and the crudeness of the 'two distinct entities' construction (p. 2). They set about elucidating some of the tensions and debates at the heart of the 'feminist–poststructuralist interface' (p. 14), with a view to the eventual dissolution of that dualism (p. 3).

The contributors to the book differ in the degree to which they take issue with or attempt to subvert that dualism (p. 3). A variety of topics are covered, including writing, narrative, aggression, 'voice' in girls' development, ethnic identity and motherhood, women's accounts of 'shame', gender identity, feminists researching men, feminist mental health, and developmental psychology. Two chapters which stand out and will be of particular interest to *Discourse & Society* readers are those by Gill, and Wetherell and Edley – since they engage with complex debates at the heart of discursive psychology. Gill, for example, discusses the postmodern 'crisis of representation' and the 'reflexive paradoxes' this crisis has engendered (p. 20). How can one write about the experience of women, when the writing itself constructs the experience? Is there no 'transcendent standpoint from which the 'real' can be apprehended'? (p. 20).

Gill offers a critique of the work of both feminist standpoint theorists such as Harding, Haraway and Hill Collins, and the 'radical constitutive reflexivity' of sociologists of scientific knowledge (SSK) such as Steve Woolgar and Malcolm Ashmore. She argues that both perspectives, though very different, 'share a desire to escape from the reflexive paradox' (p. 21), thus avoiding its full implications (p. 38). Standpoint theorists – with their focus on 'strong objectivity' – ground knowledge claims 'in the experiences of marginalized groups' (p. 38), yet have not acknowledged the politics of constructing such standpoints in the first place (p. 38). Advocates of SSK, on the other hand, use 'new literary forms', which, Gill says, reinforce rather than challenge 'authorial authority' (p. 35). Gill is vehement: 'SSK has faced the problem by obsessing about it – like picking at a scab . . . ceaselessly deconstructing their own discourse' (p. 39). Developing the argument of her 1995 paper, which stimulated so much debate (see Potter, 1998), Gill argues for an approach which centres politics and accountability (p. 19). Rather than trying to find a way out, this approach acknowledges the crisis and produces knowledge 'with only contingent guarantees and politics at its heart' (p. 21 and see also Marshall et al., p. 126 and Willott, pp. 174 ff).

Wetherell and Edley set out their 'feminist, broadly poststructuralist social psychology' of masculine identities (p. 171). Again, developing arguments expressed in earlier papers (see Edley and Wetherell, 1997), they argue that gender has a 'dual nature' (p. 163). The self is both 'positioned' – in a Foucauldian sense – and an 'active creator' (p. 168). Wetherell and Edley suggest that we can manage this distinction analytically (p. 160) by combining the notion of 'gender practice' developed in Connell's work on masculinity, with the approach to practice developed in ethnomethodology and discursive psychology. However, they argue, in order to see the regularity and patterning of gender practices, one needs to move away from an exclusive focus on participant concerns and short data extracts (the kind of approach advocated by Schegloff, 1997), to a consideration of the patterns found in longer sequences across a range of contexts.

While these two studies are particularly likely to generate debate, there are at least two problematic assumptions enmeshed throughout the book which limit the dissolution of dualisms that Henwood et al. seek. First, most authors retain a Foucauldian understanding of discourse. For example, there is talk about 'discourses which produce masculinity' (Wetherell and Edley, p. 157), how 'discourse circumscribes what we can know and speak about' (Jackson, p. 47), the way in which gender is 'shaped by cultural discourses' (Squire, p. 75), and how 'the words of others carry the force of the dominant culture' (Brown, p. 109). This conceptualization has a tendency to reify discourse, presenting gender as determined 'from above' in unseen ways, rather than actively constituted in situ.

Second, many of the arguments are centred around a 'straw man' of relativism, constructing it as the demon to be escaped from at all costs (as opposed to being something one might seriously engage with). Contributors refer to relativism as a 'trap' (Jackson, pp. 61–2), 'feminism's nemesis' (Squire, p. 81), as leading to 'paralysis' (Squire, p. 86), 'a theoretical and political thorn in the poststructuralist flesh' (Willott, p. 185), and as providing 'no grounds for critique or political action' (Willott, p. 185).

However, Gill actually comes closest to a relativist type argument in her claim that all knowledge claims are political, 'partial, socially situated and contingent'

(p. 39). Indeed, reflexive relativists are not trying to escape from the reflexive paradox, as Gill claims, but are thoroughly enmeshed in highlighting this very point! The relativist approach is entirely compatible with Henwood et al.'s call for a critical perspective which involves the continual 'questioning and reflexive ways of approaching' (p. 5) its subject matter.

This book will appeal to feminist discursive psychologists as well as those with a more general interest in feminist theory. Overall, however, the organization of the book appears rather haphazard, making it hard for the reader to navigate a path through the competing definitions and various conceptualizations of 'standpoints' and 'differences'. With dualistic thinking so central to current feminist and social science theorizing, and the corresponding reluctance to take up the Schegloffian (1997) or SSK challenge, it is hard to see how feminist psychology will provide anything more than a slightly different take on old, well-rehearsed themes – let alone set about dissolving the dualisms upon which its own foundations (seemingly) depend.

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MICHELE KNOBEL, *Everyday Literacies: Students, Discourse and Social Practice*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. x + 274 pp. $29.95 (pbk)

The point of departure of this book is a concern with the current *mismatch* between international trends in approaches to language and literacy education in (state-mandated) curricula and (theoretical) sociocultural understandings of language, and what it means to be literate today. An additional, and more serious, outcome of this mismatch pertains to the current political and quasi-academic emphasis on finding easy-to-administer and easy-to-fix methods to promote reading and writing excellence as aspects of moral and national agendas.

Classical studies from the early 1980s (e.g. Heath, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984) have led to a major shift in how issues related to literacy are being understood (at least at the theoretical level). These newer, pluralistic and dynamic understandings of literacies have grown from studies of *language use* with an empirically ethnographically inspired approach to the study of communication. Interestingly enough, these newer understandings do not seem to have had any noticeable impact on the very institution that is seen as having responsibility for the teaching of literacy. The present book contributes not just to the growing empirical literature in this area but also, in a serious way, attempts to bridge an important gap between ways in which policy agendas related to classroom practices and teacher training. Thus the issues raised in this book challenge, in important ways, dominant ideologies which shape classroom practices.

By discussing issues related to language and literacy practices, Knobel critically questions directions in curriculum and genre theory in terms of 'claims about direct relationships between language use and power' (p. 94) by studying everyday life, both *inside* and *outside* classrooms, in terms of what it means to be a successful student. Case studies of four very different young (12–13-year-olds; two males, two females) Australian students-in-interaction-with-others form the empirical clay which the author skilfully moulds using a fruitful synthesis of James Paul Gee's theory of *d/Discourses* and conceptual methodological tools inspired from the work of Judith Green and the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group. While Chapter 2 is an ambitious attempt to present the salient features of these orientations (against a backdrop of a historical tour of sociolinguistics), and thereby creates the framework that inspires the analysis and interpretations offered in the four empirical chapters (Chs 3–6), the last two chapters of the book extend the analytical scope of Gee and Green's orientations.

Knobel also expands interpretation possibilities by making use of insights provided by scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Shirley Brice Heath, Barbara Rogoff, Valerie Walkerdine, among others, whose writings have a bearing on different complexities which co-ordinate and constitute the everyday lives and identities of the four young people we meet in this book. In addition, the synthesis of these orientations to the overall discussions in the two concluding chapters is skilfully executed and extends the theoretical–methodological framework presented in Chapter 2.

The four case studies are presented as a tapestry where a multi-layered critical analysis of mundane life patterns of the past and present woven in bright colours, and glimpses of the young adults' post-study and more recent life trajectories, dot the end of the concluding chapter. These case studies cover a diverse cross-cultural spectrum of discourse practices and lifestyles and where the foci are the intersections between primary and secondary **D**iscourses ('forms of life') and **d**iscourses ('language bits').

An obvious empirical strength of this study is that it takes seriously language practices *outside* institutionalized school settings. More recent studies in the intersection of education and language research corroborate an underlying theme of this book, i.e. while *language skills* are stressed inside many classrooms, students are often unwittingly denied opportunities to become members of meaningful Discourses. Given the radically changing times in which we live, this could have far-reaching consequences.

Another educational relevance of this book is that by skilfully shifting the focus to teaching practices and ‘doing school’ (Ch. 7) together with theoretically speared ‘research methodology that enables dialogical analyses between the individual and the social’ (p. 207) in Chapter 8, the author attempts to draw specific implications for teacher education. This type of theorizing is significant and, in my view, has as an important bearing on the institutionalized practices that produce success and failure in reading and writing in educational settings everywhere. Importantly, the author steers clear of a pragmatic–interventionist agenda where *better* classroom methods and *Truths* are sought and outlined. Instead, her agenda is to investigate the range of social and language practices that students participate in, and construct and co-ordinate in their everyday lives during the last decade of the millennium. And here she calls for developing metalevel understandings of classrooms as complex social constructions set within institutional frameworks, suggesting that these understandings can be accrued, for *both* teachers and students, through ‘ethnographic approaches to language and literacy education’ (p. 231).

With its sophisticated theoretical and descriptive base and its *issue-oriented* (as opposed to a *discipline-oriented*) nature, this book would lend itself well as a potential socializing text for students in a number of fields of study into what it can mean to *do ethnography*. The text highlights important issues related to *writing ethnography*, including exploring the nitty-gritty issues of data collection, analysing and writing, and representational aspects of empirical data. Here alternative forms of ethnographic data representations in the book, such as maps of seating configurations in classrooms – a current issue in classroom ethnography writing in Scandinavia – could have been enriching. There is also a need for a more consequent (re)presentation of data and analysis in the empirical chapters. However, the textual strategy of inserting Discourse phenomena into the rich interpretive analysis offered, in addition to the self-critical voice employed by Knobel, succeeds in making this an important contribution to literacy studies at the end of the 1990s. Without being presumptuous, I will contribute to Knobel’s explicit understanding of this study as being ‘part of an ongoing conversation’ (p. 217), by suggesting that a sociocultural theoretical understanding of discourse and educational theory and practice offered in the current writings of Per Linell, Roger Säljö and James Wertsch among others, would further the already rich synthesis offered in this book.

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