

analysis of discourse, speech act theory and pragmatics, conversation analysis, the social constructionist view of discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. Strengths and limitations of discourse studies are also discussed.

Riggenbach, H. (1999), *Discourse Analysis in the Language Classroom*. Volume 1: The Spoken Language. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 1. Overview: Discourse analysis in the language classroom.

Riggenbach's book provides many practical examples of how discourse analysis can be used in language learning classrooms. The introductory chapter to her book outlines the theoretical background to her book, covering a number of key topics in the analysis of spoken and written discourse. Riggenbach discusses what discourse analysis means for language teaching in terms of methodology, materials development and syllabus design.

## 2 Discourse and society

### Chapter overview

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 2.1 Discourse communities and speech communities        | 24 |
| 2.2 Speech communities and spoken and written discourse | 27 |
| 2.3 Discourse and language choice                       | 29 |
| 2.4 Discourse, social class and social networks         | 31 |
| 2.5 Discourse and gender                                | 31 |
| 2.6 Discourse and sexuality                             | 37 |
| 2.7 Discourse and identity                              | 38 |
| 2.8 Discourse and ideology                              | 45 |
| 2.9 Conclusion  | 48 |
| 2.10 Discussion questions                               | 48 |
| 2.11 Data analysis projects                             | 49 |
| 2.12 Directions for further reading                     | 50 |

The previous chapter discussed the social-situatedness of discourse; that is, that spoken and written discourse occurs in particular social and cultural settings and is used and understood in different ways in different social and cultural settings. This chapter will discuss, in more detail, important aspects of the social and cultural settings of spoken and written discourse. It will start with a discussion of the notion of *discourse community* and the related notion of *speech community*. Both of these have an influence on what we say and how we say it. They also influence the *language variety* we choose to use as we speak or write in the setting we are in. Other factors which affect our use of language are the *social class* we are a member of (or the social class of the people we are communicating with) as well as the *social networks* we are part of. Within these social groups and social networks, there are various ways we express our *social identity* through discourse. One of the identities we express is our *gendered identity*. This is a topic that has been discussed at great length (and in

changing ways) in the area of discourse analysis, and along with *discourse and identity*, is discussed in this chapter. The issue of *ideology and discourse*, a further important topic in the area of discourse analysis, is also discussed in this chapter.

## 2.1 Discourse communities and speech communities

A key notion in the area of discourse analysis is the concept of *discourse community* (see box below for definition). Swales (1990) provides a set of characteristics for identifying a group of people as members of a particular discourse community. The group must have some set of shared common goals, some mechanisms for communication, and some way of providing the exchange of information amongst its members. The community must have its own particular genres, its own set of specialized terminology and vocabulary, and a high level of expertise in its particular area. These goals may be formally agreed upon (as in the case of clubs and associations) 'or they may be more tacit' (Swales 1990: 24). The ways in which people communicate with each other and exchange information will vary according to the group. This might include meetings, newsletters, casual conversations or a range of other types of written and/or spoken communication. That is, the discourse community will have particular ways of communicating with each other and ways of getting things done that have developed through time. There will also be a threshold level of expertise in the use of the genres the discourse community uses for its communications for someone to be considered a member of that community.

A *discourse community* is a group of people who share some kind of activity such as members of a club or association who have regular meetings, or a group of students who go to classes at the same university. Members of a discourse community have particular ways of communicating with each other. They generally have shared goals and may have shared values and beliefs. A person is often a member of more than one discourse community. Someone may be a university student, a member of a community volunteer organization and a member of a church group, for example. The ways in which they communicate in each of these groups, and the values and beliefs that are most prominent in each of these groups may vary. There may also be discourse communities within discourse communities. Academic departments, for example, may differ in the ways that they do

things and the beliefs and values that they hold, as indeed may other parts of the university.

A telephone call centre is an example of a discourse community. Cameron's (2000) study of telephone call centres in the UK suggests what some of the characteristics of this kind of discourse community might be. She found, for example, that the telephone operators in the call centres she examined were trained to communicate with customers on the phone in very particular ways. They were trained to answer the phone 'with a smile in their voice'. They were asked to pay attention to the pitch of their voice so that they conveyed a sense of confidence and sincerity in what they said. They were required to talk neither too loudly nor too quietly. They were trained not to drag out what they said, nor to speed through what they were saying. They were also required to provide sufficient feedback to their callers so that the callers knew they had been understood.

Call centre workers also have common goals, that of providing the service or making the sales the centre is set up for, common ways of sharing information amongst telephone workers, their own particular service call genres, and their own terminology and vocabulary for the product or service they are dealing with. There is also a specific level of expertise required for successful call centre workers, both in the knowledge of the product or service, and in the way call centre workers deal with their callers. New workers may be hired for a probationary period, for example, until it is clear that they have met the threshold level of performance required to be members of the particular call centre discourse community. If they do not meet this threshold level, their position with the company may be terminated.

People do, however, have different degrees of membership of discourse communities. That is, discourse communities may consist of close-knit networks of members such as writers of poetry and their readers, or loose-knit groups of members such as advertising producers, consumers and contributors to online discussion boards. Discourse communities may also be made up of several overlapping groups of people. People, further, may be (and normally are) members of more than just the one single discourse community. A person, thus, may be a call centre operator, a member of a poetry group, a member of school parent-teacher group and contributor to an online discussion board. A person may also have to operate in a number of different roles in the same discourse community. For example, a person may be working towards a doctoral degree in one part of a university and in another part of the university be a new (or indeed long-standing)

member of academic staff. The 'ways of belonging' may be quite different in each of these parts of the discourse community, as may be the genres that people use and the social relations within the different parts of the discourse community.

Discourse communities also interact with wider *speech communities*. For example, the academic discourse community of students and academics also interacts with the wider speech community of the town or city in which the academic institution is located (Swales 1993). It is for these reasons that some people prefer the term *communities of practice* (Wenger 1998; Barton and Tusting 2005) to the term 'discourse community'.

The notion of discourse community is not, however, as straightforward a concept as it might seem. There are often discourse communities within discourse communities. Swales' (1998) book *Other Floors, Other Voices* shows this well. Swales carried out a study of the building in which he was working at the time at the University of Michigan. He worked on the top floor of a small university building. The other floors were occupied by the computing resource site and a herbarium. He looked at the kinds of activities people working on each floor were engaged in and the kinds of texts they wrote. He also interviewed members of staff to get an understanding of why they wrote the kinds of texts they did. He found that people on each floor wrote quite different texts and were an example of a discourse community of their own. Swales proposes the notion of *place discourse community* to account for this kind of situation.

Devitt (2004: 42–4) adds to this discussion by proposing three types of groups of language user: *communities*, *collectives* and *networks*. Communities are 'groups of people who share substantial amounts of time together in common endeavors', such as a group of people who all work in the same office. Collectives are groups of people that 'form around a single repeated interest, without the frequency or intensity of contact of a community', such as people who are members of a bee-keeping group, or voluntary members of a community telephone advice service. Networks are groups of people that are not as tightly knit as speech communities with connections being made by one person 'who knows another person, who knows another person', such as connections that are made through email messages sent and received by people who may never have (or never will) met each other, but are participating in a common discourse.

## 2.2 Speech communities and spoken and written discourse

The term *speech community* is broader than the term discourse community. It is also important for the discussions of spoken and written discourse. A speech community, in general linguistics, refers to any group of people that speak the same language, such as French, English or German, etc. Sociolinguists, however, prefer to use the term speech community in a narrower sense to refer to people who not only use the same language, repertoire or varieties of a language, but who also have the opportunity to interact with each other (Spolsky 1998). As Spolsky (1998: 25) puts it:

There is no theoretical limitation on the location and size of a speech community, which is in practice defined by its sharing a set of language varieties (its repertoire) and a set of norms for using them.

It is not essential, however, that all members of the speech community know and use all of these languages or language varieties. They will, however, 'recognise the conditions under which other members of the community believe it is appropriate to use each of them' (Spolsky 1998: 25). In a city such as Shanghai, for example, most local Chinese will know and use standard Mandarin. People who were born and grew up in Shanghai will also most likely know and speak Shanghainese as well, the local dialect of Shanghai, and know where and when to use this dialect. In some settings Mandarin may be more appropriate and in others Shanghainese. Members of the speech community will know this, even if they vary in their command of the different languages or language varieties. The notion of speech community, then, is broader than that of discourse communities. It includes discourse communities and the repertoire and varieties of languages that members of the speech community use to interact with each other.

The notion of speech communities is important for the effective use of spoken and written discourse. Sometimes communication may only succeed when speakers recognize (or believe) that they are part of the same speech community. The globalization of call centres has brought this particularly into focus. Japan, for example, recently sent some of its call centres offshore into parts of China where there are numbers of fluent second language speakers of Japanese. Callers from Japan did not realize, however, that they were speaking to someone in China. When they realized this, through, for example, a mistake in the use of honorifics, misunderstandings and even arguments occurred.

Some call centres in China have tried to overcome this problem by employing young Japanese to work in their call centres so that Japanese callers will think they are speaking to someone in the same country and, in turn, the same speech community (Aoki 2005). Call centres in India also have a similar problem when someone calls from the US, for example, not believing they are speaking to an American call centre operator. Some call centres in India, for example, now have the weather and US sports results displayed on TV monitors for the call centre workers to refer to as they take their calls to give the impression that callers are speaking to someone from their own speech community.

### *i. Defining a speech community*

There are a number of factors which help to define a speech community other than just language. These might include social, geographical, cultural, political and ethnic factors, race, age and gender. Members of a speech community may share a particular set of norms for communication which reflect certain views on linguistic behaviour such as what is the most prestigious variety of the language in the particular setting, even if not all members of the community actually are able to use this variety. A person, further, may be a member of more than the one speech community (as they may be members of more than the one discourse community). They may switch from identifying with one speech community to another, 'even in the course of a single utterance' (Wardhaugh 1998: 124).

Speakers may not always, however, be full members of a particular speech community, just as they may not be full members of a discourse community. In a second language setting, for example, a speaker may participate, only to a certain degree, in the target speech community. The degree to which this occurs may be due to factors such as age of entry into the speech community, the speech community's attitudes and expectations towards the place of second language speakers in the speech community or other factors such as educational or occupational opportunities, or limitations, in the particular speech community. It may also depend on a person's degree of proficiency in the second language and the extent to which they want (or need) to be part of the second language speech community.

If, for example, I am a visiting professor for a semester at a Japanese university and have been invited to give classes in English, I may not need a lot of Japanese to survive for the period of time that I am there. I may decide to learn some Japanese phrases such as greetings and how to say thank you so I can establish some kind of social

relationship with the Japanese staff that are looking after me and people I deal with in shops. If I have more complex needs, such as finding out the room I need to teach in and how to order stationery, I may need to rely on an English-speaking Japanese student or a member of staff that has been assigned to me to help with this sort of thing. In this case, I am only a very peripheral member of the local speech community, even though I am surrounded by it. This has important implications for the extent to which I will learn (or not) the genres of the institution I am working in; that is, the extent to which I need (and am expected) to participate in its genres. As a visiting professor, I am most likely not expected to attend meetings of the department I am working in. If I were working as a regular member of staff, however, I would be expected to attend and participate in departmental meetings (which most likely will be held in Japanese). My learning and genre needs, and my ability to participate in the spoken and written discourses of the speech and discourse community then would be quite different.

Speech communities, further, may be quite separate from each other or they may overlap or intersect with each other. Speakers often have a *repertoire* of social identities (see 'Discourse and identity' below) and speech community memberships each of which is associated with particular kinds of verbal and non-verbal expression (Wardhaugh 1998). As Saville-Troike (1996: 357) argues, which speech community or speech communities 'individuals orient themselves to at any given moment – which set of social and communicative rules they use – is part of the strategy of communication.' Indeed, much linguistic behaviour can be explained in terms of the various *social networks* (Milroy 1987) we are part of and the *communicative repertoire* or range of languages, language varieties, styles and registers we draw on when we participate in the spoken and written discourse of these networks.

## **2.3 Discourse and language choice**

Speakers, then, often have a repertoire of social identities and discourse community memberships. They may also have a *linguistic repertoire* that they draw on for their linguistic interactions. That is, they may have a number of languages or language varieties they use to interact in in their particular communities. This kind of situation is common in many parts of the world. The choice of language or language variety may be determined by the domain the language is being used in, such as with family, among friends, and in religious, educational and employment settings. Social factors such as who we are

speaking to, the social context of the interaction, the topic, function and goal of the interaction, social distance between speakers, the formality of the setting or type of interaction and the status of each of the speakers are also important for accounting for the language choice that a person makes in these kinds of settings (Holmes 2001).

The use of slang among teenagers in Singapore illustrates a deliberate choice in the use of a language variety to communicate with each other as well as to signal a particular group membership. In an article in the Singapore *Sunday Times* titled 'So steady pom pi pi', Tan (2005) discusses how teenagers in Singapore use slang in their speech as a way of bonding with their friends as well as to ensure their conversations will remain private. For example, one Singaporean teenager coined the acronym 'CCG' to mean 'cute cute guy' so that she could talk about (very cute) boys to her friend without anyone else understanding what she was saying. Another coined the term 'CMI' to describe someone who 'cannot make it' or is not up to standard. The expression 'steady pom pi pi' (a play on the words for whistle in Mandarin and Hokkien) means someone that is always cool and ready for any situation. One teenager interviewed described the use of homemade slang as 'a group thing', saying that people who go around in the same circles will use the same type of slang so that others will not understand what they are saying. As Peter Tan from the National University of Singapore explains these groups 'mark themselves by the way they dress, the activities they share, their hairstyle, and of course, the way they talk' (Tan 2005: 38).

A speaker or writer may also be the speaker of a particular language variety but be using that variety to communicate with a wider speech community than just their own. The best seller *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (Truss 2003), for example, is written in standard British English but is clearly not aimed at just the one single speech community. It has been a best-seller in the US, the UK and Australia, all of which are different speech communities. The BBC *Panorama* interview with Princess Diana (BBC 1995), equally, had more than a single speech community in mind as it was made. It was broadcast worldwide and achieved an audience of over 200 million people (Kurzon 1996), well beyond the speech community in which it was originally located. *Casablanca*, like most Hollywood films, had a much broader audience in mind than just the US when it was made even if, in its early days, the US market was its main focus. The HBO show *Sex and the City* equally, is aimed at a viewership of different speech communities around the world, even though the cast of the show, Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte, are clearly members of the same speech community, residents of New York City.

## 2.4 Discourse, social class and social networks

A further factor which influences the use of spoken and written discourse is social class. Social class is, however, somewhat difficult to define as its identification can be somewhat subjective. Factors which may help with this include occupation, education, income, housing and its location (Labov 1966). Other factors which may help with social groupings might include religious affiliation, leisure time activities and membership of community organizations (Wardhaugh 1998).

A group of speakers may appear to be very similar in terms of social class membership, however, but differ considerably in their use of language as they interact in the social networks they belong to and the spoken and written genres used by those networks. Social networks may be based, for example, on kinship ties, religious affiliations, neighbourhood membership, employee relations and leisure time activities. Milroy and Milroy's (1978) study of social networks in Belfast showed social networks to be important influences on the use of language. They saw, in particular, the stronger and more closeknit the network, and the more solidarity within the network, the greater the influence on language use and the maintenance of language varieties. As Milroy and Milroy (1997: 60–1) explain:

Social networks and social class represent different orders of generalization about social organization. Class accounts for the hierarchical structure of society . . . , whereas network deals with the dimension of solidarity at the level of the individual and his or her everyday contacts.

Each of these has an impact on how speakers represent themselves to each other in their use of spoken and written discourse. As Cameron and Kulick (2003: 11) observe, the use of language, 'whatever else it accomplishes, is an "act of identity", a means whereby people convey to one another what kinds of people they are'. These identities, further, are not 'natural'; they are social constructions. As speakers construct their gendered identities in interaction (Holmes 1997), so too do they construct their social (and other) identities.

## 2.5 Discourse and gender

Early work in the analysis of gender and discourse looked at the relationship between the use of language and the biological category of sex. This has now moved to an examination of the ways language is used in relation to the social category, or rather the *socially*

constructed category, of gender. As Weatherall (2002: 102) explains gender 'is not just a natural and inevitable consequence of one's sex.' It is, rather, 'part of the routine, ongoing work of everyday, mundane, social interaction'; that is, 'the product of social practice' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 5). As Swann (2002: 47) has pointed out:

gender as a social category has come to be seen as highly fluid, or less well defined than it once appeared. In line with gender theory more generally, researchers interested in language and gender have focussed increasingly on plurality and diversity amongst female and male language users, and on gender as performativity – something that is 'done' in context, rather than a fixed attribute.

Simone de Beauvoir famously said 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. *Performativity* is based on the view that in saying something, we do, or 'become' it. A person learns, for example, how to do and, in turn 'display', being a woman in a particular social setting, of a particular social class. People perform particular identities through their use of language and other ways of expressing themselves in their interactions with each other. Mostly, this is done unconsciously as we 'repeat acts' such as gestures, movement and ways of using language that signify, or *index* a particular identity. These acts are not, however, natural nor are they part of the essential attributes of a person. They are part of what people acquire in their interactions with each other.

In her book *Language and Women's Place* Lakoff (1975) proposed what she called 'women's language'; that is, a use of language that is different from 'men's language' or, rather, what she termed 'neutral language'. This language, she argued, included features such as the use of overly polite forms, the use of question tags, rising intonation in declaratives, the avoidance of expletives, a greater use of diminutives and euphemisms, the use of more hedges and mitigating devices, more indirectness and the use of particular vocabulary items such as 'adorable,' 'charming' and 'sweet' (women's language) versus 'great', 'terrific' and 'cool' (neutral language). This use of language, she argued, made women's language tentative and, coupled with the use of demeaning and trivializing terms for women, works to keep women in their place in society. These differences, she argued, were the result of, and reinforced, men's dominance over women.

Lakoff's book led to two separate views of women's language, the *dominance* approach and the *difference* (or cultural) approach. Spender's (1980) *Man Made Language* is an example of the dominance

approach which sees differences in the use of language as a result of men's domination over women. This view focuses on the distribution of power in society and argues that women's language reflects women's subordinate position in society and persists to keep them in that position (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Participants in discourse, in this view, collude in sustaining and perpetuating male dominance and female oppression in society. West and Zimmerman (1983), for example, argued that men deny equal status to women in conversation and that linguistic gestures of power, although they might seem minor if viewed on their own, are an integral part of women's placement in the social scheme of things. These gestures, they argue, remind women, on a daily basis, of their subordinate position in society. That is, they are a way of *doing* power.

Tannen's (1990) *You Just Don't Understand* is an example of the difference approach. Tannen argued that boys and girls live in different subcultures in the way that people from different social and ethnic backgrounds might be described as being part of different subcultures. As a consequence boys and girls grow up learning different ways of using language and communicating with people in other cultural groups (for example, men). Since then other researchers have argued that such a distinction is too simplistic and that power and sub-cultural factors are not in an either/or relationship with each other. Uchida (1992) and Lakoff (1990) in her more recent work, argue that gender, power and subculture are intertwined (Uchida) and inseparable (Lakoff) and that dominance and difference work together to simultaneously compose the construct of gender.

In a critique of both the dominance and difference views of language and gender, Cameron (1998) argues that expressions of gender and power are always context-specific and need to be understood in relation to who the person is speaking to, 'from what position and for what purpose' (Cameron 1998: 451); that is, what the use of language means in terms of the relationship between the speakers in the particular situation in which the interaction occurs. We need, then, a view of gender and discourse that looks at how people, in particular social and cultural interactions, do gender through their use of language.

Many of the conversations in the TV show *Sex and the City* are examples of the way the lead characters, through their use of language, do gender. In the following extract, Miranda asks Carrie why she accepted her boyfriend's proposal of marriage. In her response, Carrie both enacts and affirms, through her use of language, her gendered identity, that of a woman who, because she loves her boyfriend, has to accept his proposal of marriage:

- Miranda: I'm going to ask you an unpleasant question now. Why did you ever say yes?  
 Carrie: Because I love him ... a man you love kneels in the street, and offers you a ring. You say yes. That is what you do.  
 (Change of a Dress, 4: 15)

The discussion of how men and women speak, and what they do as they speak, has also been extended to how people speak about men and women. Holmes (2004), for example, compared the use of the terms *woman* and *lady* and found that the social significance of these terms has changed over the last 30 years. She found *woman*, for example, has moved from being marked as impolite at the time Lakoff was writing to a situation where this is no longer the case (although *woman* is more frequently used in written British English than in spoken British English). She also found that while *lady/ladies* may be used as a politeness marker in formal settings (as it was becoming at the time Lakoff was writing), nowadays, in informal settings, it is also used to trivialize and patronize.

As Holmes (2004: 156) argues, language choices are often enactments of who's in charge and 'whose values will prevail.' Richardson's (2000) study of the use of disparaging language and sexually humiliating formulae by male members of a cricket club to talk about women provides an example of this. Richardson found, as did Cameron (1999) in her study of talk between fraternity brothers in the US, that the men in her study used their talk, and the traditional 'women only' discourse of gossip, to create solidarity as a group, and to construct their heterosexual masculinity.

Mean's (2001) study of male football referees' use of language with men's and women's football teams shows a similar example of the use of language to 'do gender,' and to confirm masculine identity. She talks about sporting as a male category where values such as power and aggressiveness are highly valued, like in a form of combat. She found speed, loud talk and shouting to be ways in which these values were expressed in the male referee's language. She also found the male referees used fast continuous talk in a way that never occurred in women's football matches. The following extract, by a male referee, is an example of this. In this extract louder talk is in italics and shouting is in capitals. (.) represents a pause of less than a second.

- R: go on lads (.) keep going keep going keep going OH  
 KEEP GOING LADS KEEP GOING LADS JUST INSIDE  
 CARRY ON (.) INSIDE (.) KEEP GOING (.) (whistle  
 blown) (.) go on play lads (.) play lads (.) keep going (.)  
 right here mate (.) play lads.

(Mean 2001: 795)

The male referees in Mean's data also frequently referred to the male players with address terms such as 'lads', 'fellas' and 'mates' as a way of showing group membership and solidarity with them. None of the female referees used address terms in this way.

Davies' (2003a) study of classroom storytelling activities shows further examples of gendered discourse. The girls in her study used what she calls 'friendship talk' in their storytelling as they collaborated and exchanged opinions and ideas about the stories they were telling. They worked with each other in a collaborative way, forming learning allegiances with each other as they did this. The boys, on the other hand, had to choose whether they would join in the 'macho discourse' of the young male group or not, and so be ostracized from the group. The boys used the word 'gay', for example, to defame boys they did not see as being part of the group (whether they were gay or not) and as a way of doing male 'macho gender'. Boys who wanted to be part of the group adjusted their behaviour so the term 'gay' would not be directed at them.

Hall's (1995) study of the use of language by telephone sex workers in the US provides a further example of how speakers create gendered identities through their use of language. She found many of the workers used language similar to Lakoff's women's language as they talked to their clients on the phone. Not all of the sex workers in Hall's study were heterosexual, although this was the persona they were projecting, nor were they all female. One was a male Mexican American who took pride in being able to 'replicate' Asian, Latina and Black women's personas though his use of accent, intonation, voice quality and choice of vocabulary. The workers, thus, used 'gendered styles to construct sexual meaning' (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 59).

Gender, then, is 'not something a person "has", but something that a person does' (Cameron 2005a: 49). Gender (and in turn other identities) is not a result of who people (already) are but a result of, among other things, the way they talk and what they do.

As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 4) argue:

gender doesn't just exist, but is continually produced, reproduced, and indeed changed through people's performance of gendered acts, as they project their own claimed gender identities, ratify or challenge other's identities, and in various ways support or challenge systems of gender relations and privilege.

*Sex and the City* provides many examples of the lead characters *doing gender identity* of a certain kind (among other things, independent successful professional New York City women of a certain age and certain social class) not only in the way they talk, but also in the way

they dress, and the way they behave as they speak to each other, their lovers and their friends. What to some people, then, may seem natural in their interactions is a result of what Butler (1990: 33) calls 'a set of repeated acts' and a 'repeated stylisation of the body'. These gendered identities are then 'reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts' (Cameron 1999: 444) in accordance with historically and socially constructed cultural norms which define (this particular view of) femininity.

Gender identity then is a complex construction. All levels of language and discourse, as well as aspects of nonverbal and other kinds of behaviour are involved in doing gender (Butler 2004). Gender, further, interacts with other factors such as social class and ethnicity. As Holmes observes:

gender is only one part of a person's social identity, and it is an aspect which will be more or less salient in different contexts. In some contexts, for example, it may be more important to emphasise one's professional expertise, one's ethnic identity, or one's age than one's gender.

(Holmes 1997: 9)

As Cameron and Kulick (2003: 57) argue, 'the relationship between language and gender is almost always indirect, mediated by something else'. The ways that people speak are, in the first instance, associated with particular roles, activities and personality traits, such as being a mother, gossiping and being modest (Cameron and Kulick 2003). The extent to which these roles, activities and personality traits become associated in a particular culture with being *gendered* lead to these ways of speaking pointing to, or *indexing* a particular gender in the same way that particular ways of speaking may point to, or index, a person's social class or ethnic identity (Cameron and Kulick 2003).

In some cases, a person's different identities may be difficult to separate. As Cameron and Kulick (2003: 58) point out:

The actual balance between them is not determined in advance by some general principle, but has to be negotiated in specific situations, since meaning is not only in the language itself, but also in the context where language is used by particular speakers for particular purposes.

A person, then, will have a *multiplicity of identities* or *personae* (Eckert 2002) which may be at play, all at the same time, at different levels of prominence. They may not all be equally salient at a particular moment (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002). Rather, one or more of these identities may be foregrounded at different points in time and for different

(conscious or unconscious) reasons. Cameron's (2000) study of the use of language in telephone call centres in the UK is an example of this. Here there is a mix of both professional and gendered identities. Cameron talks about a process of styling the worker where male and female workers are trained to use what is popularly thought of as a feminine communication style and expressive intonation to project rapport and to establish empathy with their callers. The worker's supervisors, managers and 'mystery outside callers' in some cases use checklists as they listen to the workers' calls to ensure the training they have been given is producing a particular gendered style of speech.

The point here, then, is that:

no way of speaking has only one potential meaning: the meanings it conveys in one context are not necessarily the same ones it conveys in another, and it may also acquire new meanings over time.

(Cameron and Kulick 2003: 57)

People, further, 'do perform gender differently in different contexts, and do sometimes behave in ways we would normally associate with the "other" gender' (Cameron 1999: 445) such as the case of the workers in Cameron's call centre study and the telephone sex workers in Hall's (1995) study.

## 2.6 Discourse and sexuality

The relationship between language and sexuality further complicates the topic of gender and discourse by adding the notion of *desire* to the discussion. While gender is something that is socially constructed, sexuality has a much more unconscious basis, based in the notion of desire; that is, a person's intimate desire for connection to others that exceeds their conscious control (Cameron and Kulick 2003). The lead characters' conversations about men in *Sex and the City*, for example, are guided by their sexual desire in just the same way as a personal ad on a gay website is guided by the gay man's desire for intimate connection with another man. So while Carrie and her friends' conversations index their gender, it is their unconscious desire that motivates their desire for intimate connections with men, and heterosexual men in general.

A person may, however, perform a certain identity in their conversation, as Carrie and her friends do in *Sex and the City*, where this may not, in fact, be the case. Rock Hudson, for example, did this famously in many of his movie roles (and in the performance of his public persona) where he 'played the straight man', displaying and maintaining male heterosexuality in his discourse (Kiesling 2002).



Jude Law gives a similar simulated gendered performance in the film *Closer* when he has online sex with Julia Roberts' future boyfriend. Masquerading as a heterosexual woman, Jude Law simulates (his view of) a woman having cybersex in an Internet chat room. The character at the other end of the line, played by Clive Owen, believes Jude Law's performance to the extent that he makes a date to meet his online sex object the next day, with the view of going to a hotel and having sex with 'her'.

Discussions of language and sexuality, then, take us beyond discussions of language and gender and into the world of language and desire. These desires, further:

are not simply private, internal phenomena but are produced and expressed – or not expressed – in social interaction, using shared and conventionalised linguistic resources.

(Cameron and Kulick 2003: 125)

Carrie and her friends do just this in *Sex and the City*. The meanings that they express are not just the result of their intentions, but are shaped by forces they 'have no conscious awareness of, let alone willed control over' (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 125). The woman at the bar in *Casablanca* is driven in the same way for intimate connection with Rick, as Carrie and her friends are in their relations with the men they meet throughout the show. Thus, whereas gendered identities may be socially inducted (and capable of being simulated or, indeed, faked as we have seen above), sexual desires are not, even though these desires may be displayed in linguistically recognizable (and regularly repeated) ways (Cameron and Kulick 2003).

## 2.7 Discourse and identity

A person may have a number of *identities*, each of which is more important at different points in time. They may have an identity as a woman, an identity as a mother, an identity as someone's partner and an identity as an office worker, for example. The ways in which people display their identities includes the way they use language and the way they interact with people. Identities are not natural, however. They are constructed, in large part, through the use of discourse. Identity, further, is not something that is fixed and remains the same throughout a person's life. It is something that is constantly constructed and reconstructed as people interact with each other. Part of having a

certain identity is that it is recognized by other people. Identity, thus, is a two-way construction.

The earliest studies into the relationship between language and identity were based on a variationist perspective; that is, they looked at the relationship between social variables such as social class in terms of variation in the use of linguistic variables such as certain features of pronunciation, or the use of non-standard grammar. More recent work, however, has taken a *poststructural* perspective on language and identity, seeing identity 'as something that is in constant process' (Swann, *et al* 2004: 140–1) arguing that it is through language, or rather through discourse, that identity is principally forged.

The information a person 'gives off' about themselves, and in turn, their identity, depends very much on the context, occasion and purpose of the discourse. It also depends on the 'space' and 'place' of the interaction (Blommaert 2005). Cameron (1999) gives an example of this in her discussion of how a group of male US college students construct heterosexual masculinity through the talk that they engage in while watching TV in their college dorm. Richardson (2000) shows something similar in her analysis of the language male cricket club members use to talk about women in the cricket club newsletter they contribute to. In both these studies the men involved perform and enact particular gendered (and sexual) identities which for that moment in time are, for them, socially salient.

It is not just through the performance of identities that they are created, however. It is also by the fact that they are recognized by other participants in the interactions. In Blommaert's (2005: 205) words, 'a lot of what happens in the field of identity is done by others, not by oneself'. In some cases this identity may only be temporary. Equally '[n]ot every identity will have the same range or scope' (Blommaert 2005: 211) nor be the same across time and physical space. As Blommaert says, people speak both in and from a place. Place, he argues 'defines people, both in their eyes and in the eyes of others' (Blommaert 2005: 223) as well as attributes certain values to their interactions. People can (and do) he argues, shift places 'frequently and delicately, and each time, in very minimal ways, express different identities' (Blommaert 2005: 224).

Thomas (2000, 2004) has explored the issues of language and identity in online chat environments, a very particular place and space. With a focus on adolescent 'cybergirls', she examines how girls use words and images to establish online identities which reflect both their fantasies and their desires in this particular setting. She does an

analysis of both the words and the images that they use to create their identities. In their online environment, the cybergirls interacted with words, symbols for words, as well as various other symbols such as emoticons and 'avatars' (visual characters which express a certain identity) in order to establish their online identities. One of her participants, Violetta, talked about how she wrote online to convey a particular persona:

Violetta: i'd have whole typing styles for people. like, if i were trying to trick someone i knew into thinking i was someone else, i'd type a lot differently than i do normally. a person's typing style can give them away like their voice does. (Thomas 2004: 367)

Thomas found that 'the girls who gain and exercise power in their online worlds are those who know how to use and manipulate words, images and technology' (Thomas 2004: 359). Some of what they did online she found reflected the kind of 'learned social accomplishments' that researchers in the area of language and gender have referred to. Some of what they did, however, reflected fantasies they had about themselves and their desired personae, the online medium giving them a safe and private place to establish these fantasized-about identities.

The identities that people establish online, then, provide an interesting example of how people create identities through their use of language (and other visual devices) that may, in some cases, be separate and distinct from their offline identity. Each of these identities are part of the ongoing process of establishing who we are, and who we want (at least at certain times) to be. It is for this reason that authors such as Thurlow *et al* (2004) prefer to talk about *identity online* rather than *online identity*. Some people communicating online may, indeed, change essential characteristics about themselves (such as their age, ethnicity, race or physical appearance) in order to present an identity online that will be more appealing to the audience they are wanting to communicate with. A Taiwanese user of online chat rooms in Tsang's (2000) study, for example, found he had more success in getting people to chat with him if he said he was Caucasian, rather than Chinese.

### *i. Identity and casual conversation*

Many of the interactions in *Sex and the City* are examples of the use of discourse to create, express and establish social (and other) identities. A common way in which the characters in the show do this is through

their use of the genre casual conversation. As Eggins and Slade (1997: 6) argue:

Despite its sometimes aimless appearance and apparently trivial content, casual conversation is, in fact, a highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity. Motivated by interpersonal needs continually to establish who we are, how we relate to others, and what we think of how the world is, casual conversation is a critical linguistic site for the negotiation of such important dimensions of our social identity as gender, generational location, sexuality, social class membership, ethnicity, and subcultural and group affiliations.

Eggins and Slade argue that people do not engage in casual conversations just to 'kill time', but rather to negotiate social identities as well as to negotiate, clarify and extend interpersonal relations. As they put it:

The apparent triviality of casual conversation disguises the significant interpersonal work it achieves as interactants enact and confirm social identities and relations.

(Eggins and Slade 1997: 16)

They describe this as the central paradox of casual conversation. As they argue, casual conversation is the type of talk in which people feel most relaxed, most spontaneous and most themselves, 'yet casual conversation is a critical site for the social construction of reality'. Casual conversations do a number of things which are crucial to discussions of language and identity. They establish solidarity 'through the confirmation of similarities', and they assert autonomy 'through the exploration of differences' (Eggins and Slade 1997: 16).

The way in which language is used in casual conversations, like all spoken interactions, is influenced by the relationship between the people speaking, the frequency with which they come into contact with each other, the degree of involvement they have with each other, and their sense of affiliation for each other. In the case of *Sex and the City*, each of the four female characters knows each other extremely well. Although they are the best of friends, they are each quite different and from quite diverse backgrounds. As they meet together, they share their experiences and negotiate their understandings of (among other things) life, love, men and sex. As Carrie and her friends talk, they construct themselves in a way which signifies (their view of) desirable Western women, of a certain social class, in a certain physical and social setting through their use of the genre casual conversation.

Understanding the social and cultural context of the *Sex and the City* conversations is critical to understanding the identities that are

being expressed and negotiated in many of the conversations. What to some people may seem natural in their interactions is a result of Butler's (2004) 'sets of repeated acts' and 'repeated stylisations of the body'; that is, the acts that they repeatedly perform which reaffirm and publicly display their views of themselves, and in turn their social identities as, among other things, independent successful professional New York City women of a certain age and certain social class.

When we speak (or write), then, we are telling other people 'something about ourselves' (Cameron 2001: 170) and relating to people in particular ways. Identity, thus, is a joint, two-way production. We may do this in a more or less active way (Sunderland and Litoseliti 2002) such as when we unconsciously perform a particular socially inducted identity, such as Carrie and her friends do in *Sex and the City*, or consciously, as the boys who wanted to be part of the group did in Davies' (2003a) study of storytelling events.

Identity, then, is not just a matter of using language in a way that reflects a particular identity. It is rather a socially-constructed self that people continually co-construct and reconstruct in their interactions with each other. This leads to different ways of doing identity with different people in different situations. A person's identity then:

is not something fixed, stable and unitary that they acquire early in life and possess forever afterwards. Rather identity is shifting and multiple, something people are continually constructing and reconstructing in their encounters with each other in the world.

(Cameron 2001: 170)

Identity is a 'negotiated experience' in which we 'define who we are by the way we experience our selves ... as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves' (Wenger 1998: 149). Identities are not fixed, but constantly being reconstructed and negotiated through the ways we do things and ways of belonging (or not) to a group (Casanave 2002). Our identities are further developed as we increase our participation in particular communities of practice. These identities, further, are based on shared sets of values, agreed-upon cultural understandings and the ideologies which underlie our use of spoken and written discourse.

## ii. Identity and written academic discourse

Identity is as much an issue in written discourse as it is in spoken discourse. This is particularly the case in student academic writing. Hyland (2002c) discusses the view that is often presented to students that academic writing is faceless, impersonal discourse. Students are

told, he says, 'to leave their personalities at the door' when they write and not use personal pronouns such as 'I' which show what is being said is the student's view or place in things. As Hyland (2002c: 352) argues, 'almost everything we write says something about us and the sort of relationship that we want to set up with our readers'. Indeed, one of the ways that expert academic writers do this, in some academic disciplines at least, is through the use of the pronoun 'I'.

Establishing writer identity is, however, something that is often difficult for second language writers. This is often complicated by students bringing a different writer 'voice' from their first language setting to the second language writing situation (Fox 1994). Students may come from backgrounds where they have considerable standing in their field of study and find it difficult to be told they need to take on the voice of a novice academic writer, and hide their point of view, as they write in their second language. Hirvela and Belcher (2001) argue that teachers need to know more about the ways students present themselves in their first language writing, and about their first language and culture identities, so they can help students deal with the issue of identity in their second language writing.

Prince (2000) carried out a study which examined just this issue. Her interest was in the ways in which second language thesis writers might be influenced (or not) by their experience of having written a thesis in their first language and culture. She looked at the experiences of a group of Chinese and Polish students, all of whom had written a thesis in their first language prior to writing a thesis in English. She found a major theme that emerged in her study was whether the students had to give up, or change, their personal identity in order to write a successful thesis in English. Prince tells how one of her Polish students, Ilona, fiercely fought to retain her personal and individual style of writing, but in the end found she had to give this away in order to pass. The Chinese students, on the other hand, did not have this experience and felt the way in which they presented themselves in their thesis was not dramatically different from how they had done this in Chinese.

Notwithstanding, all of Prince's students talked about the identity 'of being a non-English writer' that they had to deal with. Cadman (1997) also discusses this issue, arguing that the difficulty many second language students have with their writing goes far beyond being a non-English writer. A Chinese student in Cadman's study had exactly the same experience with her writing that Fox (1994) discusses. She found in her new writing environment that none of the expertise she brought with her was valued and she had no links with her past life that could help her succeed in the new academic setting.

Bartolome (1998: xiii) argues that learning to succeed in Western academic settings is not just a matter of language, but knowing the 'linguistically contextualised language' of the particular spoken and written discourses that are valued in the particular academic setting. Some students may choose to become part of this academic discourse and others may resist this. They may fear a loss of cultural identity, and not wish to be 'drowned' in the new academic culture (Prince 2000). Ilona, the Polish student in Prince's study, felt exactly this. She resisted rewriting her thesis because the thesis she was being asked to write did not reflect who she 'really was' and how she wanted to present her argument in the discourse. She wanted to wait to the very end of her thesis to reveal her findings, writing her thesis 'as a detective novel', as she described it. Revealing her findings any sooner, she felt, killed the excitement of the reading. She wanted to write a thesis with twists and turns, as she had done in Polish. She found, however, that she needed to revise her thesis so it would more closely fit the expectations of the readers of her text, the people that had been assigned to examine her thesis, in order to pass. She still asked at the end, however:

For what reason I have to read the fifteen pages if I already know the answer?  
(Prince 2002: 76)

Ilona resisted then, as much as she could, the underlying values and ideologies that underlay the piece of writing that she was producing, a masters thesis in the field of engineering, written in an English-medium university. Her view of research was that it was something 'exciting, and should be presented as such, like the revealing of a mystery, a "closer and closer" progression towards an answer' (Prince 2000: 78).

As Casanave (2002: 23) argues in her book *Writing Games*, learning to belong to a community of practice can take time and a great deal of effort. It can be filled with tensions and conflict. As she points out:

Newcomers inevitably feel the foreignness of unfamiliar practices, the unwieldiness of new forms and tools of communication, and relationships with more experienced practitioners that are not necessarily harmonious.

This is exactly what Ilona experienced as she struggled to write her thesis. Ilona found, as do many student writers, that the discourses and practices of the discipline in which she was writing was very different from what she had brought from her home culture and, unless she

revised her writing, would undermine her relationship with her readers (Hyland 2005a).

## 2.8 Discourse and ideology

The values and ideologies which underlie texts, such as the thesis that Ilona was writing, often tend to be 'hidden' rather than overtly stated. As Threadgold (1989) observes, texts are never ideology-free nor objective. Nor can they be separated from the social realities and processes they contribute to maintaining. For Threadgold, spoken and written genres are not just linguistic categories but 'among the very processes by which dominant ideologies are reproduced, transmitted and potentially changed' (1989: 107). In her view, a spoken or written genre is never just the reformulation of a linguistic model, but always the performance of a politically and historically significant process.

There are a number of ways in which ideology might be explored in a text. The analysis may start by looking at textual features in the text and move from there to explanation and interpretation of the analysis. This may include tracing underlying ideologies from the linguistic features of a text, unpacking particular biases and ideological presuppositions underlying the text and relating the text to other texts, and to readers' and speakers' own experiences and beliefs (Clark 1995).

One aspect that might be considered in this kind of analysis is the *framing* (Gee 2004; Blommaert 2005) of the text; that is, how the content of the text is presented, and the sort of angle or perspective the writer, or speaker, is taking. Closely related to framing is the notion of *foregrounding*; that is, what concepts and issues are emphasized, as well as what concepts or issues are played down or *backgrounded* (Huckin 1997) in the text. The following scene from *Sex and the City* is an example of this. Carrie had just discovered an engagement ring in her boyfriend, Aiden's, overnight bag. She then went into the kitchen and vomited. She is telling her friends about this incident:

Charlotte: You're getting engaged!  
Carrie: I threw up. I saw the ring and I threw up. That's not normal.  
Samantha: That's my reaction to marriage.  
Miranda: What do you think you might do if he asks?  
Carrie: I don't know.  
Charlotte: Just say yessss!!!  
Carrie: Well, it hasn't been long enough has it?  
Charlotte: Trey and I got engaged after only a month.  
Samantha: How long before you separated?

- Charlotte: We're together now and that's what matters. When it's right you just know.  
 Samantha: Carrie doesn't know.  
 Carrie: Carrie threw up.  
 Samantha: So it might not be right ... (Just Say Yes, 4: 12)

A key cultural value is foregrounded in this conversation: if a man asks a woman to marry him she should 'Just say yes' (the title of the episode). Other values are backgrounded, or rather omitted, such as Carrie's views on Aiden's occupation, ethnic background and social class, possibly because the audience of the show already knows this (not because, in this case, they are not relevant).

Equally important is what attitudes, points of view and values the text presupposes. A *presupposition* present in this conversation is that Aiden will formally propose to Carrie (which he later does). A further presupposition is that Aiden will ask her this directly and that she should give a direct response. This is very much an (English) culture-based assumption. Saville-Troike (2003), for example, discusses marriage proposals in Japanese showing that, in Japanese, a marriage proposal is not always directly stated and, if it is, it is not always directly responded to. An example of this is when the Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito proposed to his bride-to-be Masako (on a hunting trip). Masako did not accept the proposal immediately but took nearly three months to give a reply. When she did she said 'Will I really do?' and 'If I can be of any help to you, I will humbly accept'. The Crown Prince replied 'I will protect you throughout your life' (Asahi Newspaper 1993).

A further example of presupposition is the view expressed in the *Sex and the City* scene of marriage being based (among other things) in romantic love and desire. This is also a very culture-specific view of marriage. Farrer (2002) describes how this is only a recent phenomenon in China, for example, where marriage was, until recently, a family business, arranged by parents in accordance with social hierarchies, as Zhang in her (1986) book *Love Must Not be Forgotten* says, part of a mind-set passed down from feudal times. Arranged marriages (as opposed to 'love marriages') are still surprisingly popular on Japan. In earlier times, in Japan, as in China, marriage was a community-centred rather than a person-centred matter. Even today there is an Arranged Marriages Association in Japan which promotes the benefits of this kind of marriage (Davies and Ikeno 2002).

Recently, however, there has been a romantic revolution in China (Farrer 2002) with young urban people now expecting to be able to choose their own marriage partners and to marry for love. The award-

winning movie *House of Flying Daggers* by the Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou (2005), for example, is a glorification of romantic love and desire, telling the story of three people who sacrifice everything for love. The overlying theme of this film suggests a change in the *social semiotic of desire* in present day Chinese society, in Eckert's (2002: 109) words, 'the most powerful force in the maintenance of gender order'.

A further presupposition underlying the *Sex and the City* conversation is the issue of who will propose to whom; that is, the *agency* of the action being discussed in the conversation. It is a clear assumption here that the man will propose to the woman, not the other way round. As independent as Carrie and her friends are, it is less likely that they would propose to a man (or that they would refuse him, should he ask). Even though the leading characters in the show take an active role in their pursuit of sex and many of the other things they want from life, it is the man who initiates the action and who has the most power in the situation. Carrie waits for Aiden to propose, not the other way round.

This, of course, is just a single reading of *Sex and the City*. People from other cultures and with different social, cultural and political points of view will, of course, read *Sex and the City* in quite different ways from how I have read it here. For some people, a show such as *Sex and the City* mirrors their social identities and ideologies. For others, however, it challenges social identities and ideologies. The critical framing of texts, where we stand back and look at them in relation to their social and cultural values, can help us unpack some of the assumptions underlying the use of language and what the text is aiming to do. It also helps remind us of the importance of considering the social, political underpinnings of spoken and written discourse, as well as helping us unpack the ideological thrust of seemingly ordinary, everyday genres (Johns forthcoming).

An analysis of this kind, then, takes us beyond the level of description to a deeper understanding of texts and provides, as far as might be possible, some kind of explanation of why a text might be as it is and what it is aiming to do. It looks at the relationship between language, social norms and values and aims to describe, interpret and explain this relationship. In doing so, it aims to provide a way of exploring and, perhaps challenging, some of the hidden and 'out of sight' social, cultural and political values that underlie the use of spoken and written discourse.