

## LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL LIFE SERIES

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# Language and Power

Second edition

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## 4

## Discourse, common sense and ideology

In this chapter, I take further the view of ideology and its relationship to discourse which I introduced in Chapter 2 – the view that conventions routinely drawn upon in discourse embody ideological assumptions which come to be taken as mere ‘common sense’, and which contribute to sustaining existing power relations. Given this intimate relationship between ideology and power, this chapter will inevitably overlap with Chapter 3. Both are concerned with power, but they differ in focus. Whereas Chapter 3 was a wide-ranging discussion of language and power, Chapter 4 is specifically targeted upon *common sense in the service of power* – upon how ideologies are embedded in features of discourse which are taken for granted as matters of common sense.

The sociologist Harold Garfinkel has written of ‘the familiar common sense world of everyday life’, a world which is built entirely upon assumptions and expectations which control both the actions of members of a society and their interpretation of the actions of others. Such assumptions and expectations are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned. The common sense of discourse is a salient part of this picture. And the effectiveness of ideology depends to a considerable degree on it being merged with this common-sense background to discourse and other forms of social action.

Let me preview the content of this chapter by giving a list of the questions which are raised, in their approximate order of appearance:

- What is ‘common sense’ in discourse, how does common sense relate to the *coherence* of discourse and to processes of discourse interpretation, and what is the relationship between common sense, coherence and ideology?
- To what extent are ideologies variable within a society, and how are such variations manifested in discourse?

- What is the relationship between ideological variation and social struggle, and how is the ideological common sense of discourse generated in the course of struggle?
- How does ideological common sense affect the meanings of linguistic expressions, conventional practices of speaking and writing, and the social subjects and situations of discourse?
- How can analysts bring this backgrounded common sense into the foreground?

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### Implicit assumptions, coherence and inferencing

What must you do to make sense of a whole text (remembering, from Chapter 2, that texts may be written or spoken), to arrive at a coherent interpretation of it, assuming you already know the meanings of its constituent parts? Without trying to answer this rather big question exhaustively, let me suggest two things you must do. Firstly, you certainly need to work out how the parts of the text link to each other. Secondly, you also need to figure out how the text fits in with your previous experience of the world: what aspects of the world it relates to, or indeed what conception of the world it presupposes. In short, you need to establish a ‘fit’ between text and world.

I shall use the term *coherence* in a way which brings in both of these types of connection: (i) between the sequential parts of a text; and (ii) between (parts of) a text and ‘the world’. These are connections which *we* make as interpreters of texts; they are not made by the text itself. But in order to make them, we have to draw upon those background ‘assumptions and expectations’ I have just been referring to. The sense or coherence of a whole text is generated in a sort of chemical reaction which you get when you put together what’s in the text and what’s already ‘in’ the interpreter – that is, the common-sense assumptions and expectations of the interpreter, part of what I have called ‘members’ resources’ (MR).

Let’s begin with a brief example of the second of these types of connection, between text and world. It is just one sentence from an article about ‘birthstones’ taken from a ‘true romance’ magazine: *For many centuries, the opal was reputed to be an unfortunate stone, bringing the wearer bad luck.* (True Story Summer Special, Argus Press 1986.) What conception of the world do you need to at least temporarily entertain, if not accept, in order to make sense of this sentence? We presumably need a world in which objects such as stones are capable of affecting human lives and human fortunes! Texts of this sort are interesting in presupposing a view of the world that is ‘common sense’ for some people, but strikes others as somewhat odd. Implicit assumptions can be more easily recognized in such cases than they are elsewhere.

But this is just a single sentence; what about the coherence of whole texts? Here is a rather different sort of example, the opening of a story in a 'true romance' magazine entitled 'His kind of loving':

*His kind of loving . . .*

Driving rain almost obscured the wooded hills as I made my way along the winding roads towards the village *where I had my craft shop*.

As I drove over the bridge and towards the shop *I was excited about Geoff's arrival* that evening. I hadn't seen him since I'd left Hampshire for Scotland three months before.

Geoff had been annoyed. 'I can see there's no use my trying to change your mind, Carrie. Go ahead, move to Scotland and open your shop.'

'We can be married next year,' *I pleaded*. 'I have to take this chance of *running my own business*, Geoff.'

'Just when I think you're going to settle down, *you get this hare-brained idea*.'

*I sighed* as I remembered our conversation . . .

*Text 4.1* Source: *True Story*, Summer Special 1986

I have highlighted certain expressions in italics. What do you think they tell you about the sort of person Carrie is? Is their 'message' consistent through the extract, or are you being told contradictory things? What implicit assumptions about women do you need in order to derive this message, or these messages, from these expressions?

I think there are two 'messages' about Carrie, the one giving the text a superficial colouring of feminism, and the other firmly patriarchal: that she is an independent person (with a craft shop, her own business), and that she is a traditional subservient woman (who gets excited, pleads with 'her man', sighs, and accepts without protest her projects being called 'hare-brained'). Readers arrive at these messages by relating the italicized textual elements to implicit *frames*, which constitute accounts of what women are and do (or ought to be and do), roughly along these lines: (i) 'women are as much persons as men, and have the right to a career, to make decisions about their own lives, etc.>'; (ii) 'women are subject to men's judgements on significant aspects of their lives, they are more prone to emotion and the expression of emotion, etc.'. A group of textual elements act as *cues* for a particular frame, and the frame provides a place for each textualized detail within a coherent whole, so that the apparently diverse italicized elements are given coherence, in the process of interpretation, by the frame. Or in terms of what I said above, it is the expectations and assumptions that are already 'in' the interpreter as part of MR that give coherence to the text. (On 'frames' see Ch. 6, pp. 131–3.)

As is often the case, the 'traditional-subservient-woman' message is reinforced visually. It is contained in a picture (of Carrie and Geoff) which accompanies the opening of the story: Carrie is petite, blonde, and starry-

eyed, Geoff is tall, dark, and handsome, and is leaning towards Carrie, and towering over her, with a protective hand clasping her arm. Even the typeface in which the headline (*His kind of loving . . .*) is printed seems to have been chosen to evoke the 'true romance' paradigm.

Notice that, paradoxical as it may seem, both the production of a text and the interpretation of a text have an interpretative character. The producer of the text constructs the text as an interpretation of the world, or of the facets of the world which are then in focus; formal features of the text are *traces* of that interpretation. The traces constitute *cues* for the text interpreter, who draws upon her assumptions and expectations (incorporated in frames) to construct her interpretation of the text. Thus text interpretation is *the interpretation of an interpretation*. For neither the world nor the text does the interpretation of what is 'there' impose itself; both the production and the interpretation of texts are creative, constructive interpretative processes.

How much of your routine interpretations of the texts you routinely see or hear comes from *you* rather than from *them*? Bear in mind that images do not impose their own interpretations any more than words – the interpreter always bears some responsibility! Think about the snippets of advertising with which we are totally surrounded these days – in the underground, on buses, on hoardings, in shop windows, or coming through your letter box. What frames are you using to interpret them? What *cues* are you reacting to?

Now let's turn to the first of the aspects of coherence distinguished above, coherence between the sequential parts of a text. Implicit assumptions chain together successive parts of texts by supplying 'missing links' between explicit propositions, which the hearer/reader either supplies automatically, or works out through a process of *inferencing*, a concept we met briefly in connection with the 'Jenny Keeble' text in Chapter 3 (p. 44). Look for example at the second and third sentences of *His kind of loving* (*As I drove over the bridge . . .*). There is a coherent connection between them only if you assume a world in which the immediate prospect of seeing someone you love is likely to be exciting when you have not seen them for three months. How much working out or inferencing do you need to do to get to this assumption? None, I'd imagine; since that *is* the world for most of us, it is part of our frames for loving relationships, and it wouldn't occur to us that the sequence of sentences was anything but logical as it stands! We supply the linking assumption automatically, by a process of automatic *gap-filling*. (We can also apply the distinction between inferencing and automatic gap filling to the text/world aspect of coherence: texts can be 'fitted' to worlds either automatically, or through inferential work.)

There is no sharp dividing line between automatic gap-filling and inferencing, both because there is probably a scale from links which need no working out to links which need a lot of inferential 'work', and because a

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Need someone to talk to? We're always willing to listen. You can write to us, Dave and Lesley, at: Blue Jeans, P.O. Box No. 305, London NW1 1TX. Please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope if you'd like a personal reply.

**Embarrassed By Boys**

Please help me. I'm 13 and whenever there's a boy on TV, and my mum's in the room I get really embarrassed. I've never been out with anyone even though Mum says I'm quite pretty. How can I get over this problem?

Worried BJ fan, Chester.

Most people — girls as well as boys — go through a phase of feeling nervous with the opposite sex. It happens because all of a sudden boys aren't just friends any more — they're people you fancy and think about going out with. The secret is to relax and try to still look on the boys you know as friends. You'll find you get on much better with boys if you're not always worrying about how you look — it's much more important to have fun. Don't worry that you haven't been out with anyone yet — you've got plenty of time!

Lesley.

Text 4.2 Source: *Blue Jeans* No. 488, 24 May 1986

link which is supplied automatically by one person may need inferential work from another (or indeed from the same person on another occasion). Text 4.2 would probably not require any inferential work from regular readers of the sort of magazine it comes from, but it might from other people.

My feeling is that the common-sense assumptions which give coherence to the heading (which was printed as a 'sideline' down the left-hand side of the page) are, first, that the way to deal with 'problems' is to find someone to talk to, and, second, that the role of this 'someone' is essentially to 'listen'. In other words, the folk wisdom that you should talk to a 'good listener' with a 'sympathetic ear' about your problems rather than trying to deal with

them alone. These assumptions are necessary to connect the heading proper (*Problems*) with the sentences in small print beside it. Notice you also need to assume that talking and listening can go on in writing (and print) to make the third of these sentences cohere with the first two!

But what about the letter and reply? What implicit assumptions do you need for a coherent interpretation? Do you think you supply them automatically through 'gap-filling', or by working them out through inferencing? Do you find it difficult to bring such matters to consciousness?

First, I think that in order to coherently link the letter as a request for 'help' and the reply, we need to assume that the giving of advice in writing *is* giving help. Secondly, the word *though* in the letter is the cue for an assumption necessary to give coherence to the two parts ('clauses') of sentence 3: that a 'quite pretty' girl can expect to have been out with a boy by the age of 13. Thirdly, the content of sentence 2 (and maybe also 3) is referred back to in sentence 4 as 'this problem', on the basis of the implicit assumption that her embarrassment *is* a 'problem'. Finally, to make a coherent link between the third sentence of the reply and the sentences that precede it, we need the assumption that the solution to a 'problem' lies in a 'secret', a remedy known only to some (but passed on to 'worried BJ fan' by 'Lesley').

What is perhaps thought-provoking about examples like this is that it is the *reader* who is responsible for bringing all these contentious assumptions into the process of interpretation, not the text. None of them is asserted in the text. This suggests a powerful way in which to impose assumptions upon readers and interpreters generally: by so placing the interpreter through textual cues that she has to entertain these assumptions if she is to make sense of the text. Persuasive discourse and propaganda do this all the time, often in quite obvious ways — for instance, when a journalist begins an article with *The Soviet threat to western Europe . . .*, she presupposes there *is* a Soviet threat. Fortunately, readers do not always accept being placed where writers place them!

This is a convenient point at which to pass on to the next question I want to address — that of the relationship between 'common sense' and ideology. For the common sense of the implicit assumptions I have referred to in the above example is clearly of an ideological order. I shall explain why in the next section. Moreover, the operation of ideology can be seen in terms of ways of constructing texts which constantly and cumulatively 'impose assumptions' upon text interpreters *and* text producers, typically without either being aware of it.

### Common sense and ideology

'Common sense' is substantially, though not entirely, *ideological*, in the sense in which that term was introduced in Chapter 2, and it is this important relationship between common sense and ideology that I am primarily

concerned with here. The relationship was explored by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who refers to 'a form of practical activity' in which a 'philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical "premiss"', and 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life'. It is this conception of ideology as an 'implicit philosophy' in the practical activities of social life, backgrounded and taken for granted, that connects it to 'common sense' – a term extensively used by Gramsci himself in this connection. The rest of this chapter will be concerned to specify properties of ideological common sense.

Recall that I suggested in Chapter 2 that ideology be regarded as essentially tied to power relations. Let us correspondingly understand ideological common sense as *common sense in the service of sustaining unequal relations of power*. This is a matter of degree. In some cases the relationship to asymmetrical power relations may be a direct one, like the commonsensical assumption referred to in the last chapter, that everybody has 'freedom of speech', which disguises and helps to maintain the actuality of barriers to speech of various sorts for most people. In other cases, the relationship may be rather indirect – the 'problem page' texts in the last section, for instance, as I shall argue below. And rather than assuming a classification of common sense into 'ideological' and 'non-ideological', it will be more helpful to say that common-sense assumptions may *in varying degrees* contribute to sustaining unequal power relations.

They also do other things, also in varying degrees, such as establishing and consolidating solidarity relations among members of a particular social grouping. If you listen to the discourse of your family or friends or colleagues, you will notice just how many assumptions are taken for granted. You could argue that this is just a matter of efficiency – there's no point in spelling out what everyone assumes. But isn't being able to take so much for granted also an important sign that you 'belong'?

So what is it that makes the 'problem page' text (indirectly) ideological in its implicit assumptions? Isn't it dealing with purely *personal* problems, which have nothing to do with social power? On the face of it, it is: 'worried' of Chester is given advice on how she can overcome *her* 'problem', by adjusting to the reality of teenage gender relations. However, 'her' problem is clearly not just hers, it is shared by millions. And isn't it a social problem, rather than a personal problem? No doubt puberty has always caused difficulties for young people. But the difficulties seem particularly acute in contemporary society – because of the nature of teenage gender relations, of gender relations and their power asymmetries more generally, and ultimately because of our somewhat distorted social relationships. I think the ideological role of implicit assumptions in this instance is in providing a commonsensical framework and procedure for treating the *social* problems this girl is experiencing in a purely *individual* way. This is 'common sense sustaining unequal relations of

power' in the sense that it helps deflect attention away from an idea which could lead to power relations being questioned and challenged – that there are social causes, and social remedies, for social problems.

Ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible. If one becomes aware that a particular aspect of common sense is sustaining power inequalities at one's own expense, it ceases to *be* common sense, and may cease to have the capacity to sustain power inequalities, i.e. to function ideologically. And invisibility is achieved when ideologies are brought to discourse not as explicit elements of the text, but as the background assumptions which on the one hand lead the text producer to 'textualize' the world in a particular way, and on the other hand lead the interpreter to interpret the text in a particular way. Texts do not typically spout ideology. They so position the interpreter through their cues that she brings ideologies to the interpretation of texts – and reproduces them in the process!

For that reason, what I referred to in the last section as automatic 'gap-filling', the supplying of 'missing links' needed for sequential coherence without inferential 'work', and automatic 'fitting' of text to world, are of particular interest from an ideological perspective. The more mechanical the functioning of an ideological assumption in the construction of coherent interpretations, the less likely it is to become a focus of conscious awareness, and hence the more secure its ideological status – which means also the more effectively it is reproduced by being drawn upon in discourse.

How do your implicit assumptions about women differ from your implicit assumptions about men? Try to spot instances in your own discourse or other behaviour where your assumptions underpin coherence. Watch out for ways in which the texts you come across (including visual images) routinely cue ideological assumptions which are needed to interpret the texts.

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## Variation and struggle in ideology

There is a constant endeavour on the part of those who have power to try to impose an ideological common sense which holds for everyone, as we shall see shortly. But there is always *some* degree of ideological diversity, and indeed conflict and struggle, so that ideological uniformity is never completely achieved. That is why we are sometimes able (thankfully!) as interpreters to keep at arm's length assumptions which text producers put across as commonsensical.

Everyone will be familiar with one domain of ideological diversity: political ideologies. This is perhaps a good starting point, because we can all find political texts whose ideological common sense is at odds with our own. This certainly holds true for me in the case of this extract:

As a whole, and at all times, the efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of attention of a people, and always concentrating it on a single enemy. The more uniformly the fighting will of a people is put into action, the greater will be the magnetic force of the movement and the more powerful the impetus of the blow. It is part of the genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only, because to weak and unstable characters the knowledge that there are various enemies will lead only too easily to incipient doubts as to their own cause.

As soon as the wavering masses find themselves confronted with too many enemies, objectivity at once steps in, and the question is raised whether actually all the others are wrong and their own nation or their own movement alone is right.

Also with this comes the first paralysis of their own strength. Therefore, a number of essentially different enemies must always be regarded as one in such a way that in the opinion of the mass of one's own adherents the war is being waged against one enemy alone. This strengthens the belief in one's own cause and increases one's bitterness against the attacker.

*Text 4.3 Source: Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf*

What implicit assumptions about the nature of 'a people', and about the relationship between people and 'leader' are there here? Do you find them problematic?

It is assumed (and this is an ancient rhetorical device) that 'a people' is a sort of composite individual with the attributes of a single person (*attention, will, strength, bitterness*, having enemies), and the capacity to 'act as one', but these attributes can be sapped by disease (*paralysis*) as a result of weakness and instability. Since the people cannot sustain unity and clarity of objectives for itself (the masses are *wavering*), it falls to a 'leader' to do so – to *prevent division* and *concentrate attention*. It is assumed that the leadership of a people or nation is lodged in (*the genius of*) a single person, rather than collective.

These assumptions about the relationship between people and leader may seem extreme, but the idea of a people as a composite individual, for example, is actually quite common.

Find a passage from a political text (maybe a speech or an interview or a leaflet) whose implicit assumptions about people and leaders are alien to you, and try to spell them out as explicitly as you can. Then try the rather more difficult task of doing the same thing with a passage which accords with your political outlook!

There is certainly a great deal of variation in the extent of ideological diversity between societies, or between different periods in the history of a particular society. What determines the level of diversity? Basically the state of social relationships and social struggle, including class relationships and

class struggle. In a society where power relationships are clear cut and stable, one would not expect to find a great deal of ideological diversity. What about contemporary capitalist society? Can we for instance interpret it in terms of a simple classical model of ideology, where the whole population is unified beneath a dominant ruling-class ideology? Probably not, though this model did make rather more sense in, say, the 1950s than it does now. The contemporary picture is characterized in some areas at least by a proliferation of ideologies which Therborn has compared to 'the cacophony of sounds and signs of a big city'. Furthermore, within a society, there may well be variation between different institutions in respect of degrees of ideological diversity.

Ideological diversity sets limits on what I have been calling *ideological common sense*. Although we have seen that there are cases where ideologies with very limited constituencies are nevertheless treated as common sense (the 'birthstone' text, and the Hitler text), the most effective form of ideological common sense will be 'common' in the sense of being shared by most if not virtually all of the members of a society or institution. Obviously, the greater the ideological diversity in a society, the less this will be so.

So where do these diverse ideologies come from? Are they for instance generated at random by individuals? They come rather from differences in position, experience and interests between social groupings, which enter into relationship (and, as we shall see, ideological conflict) with each other in terms of power. These groupings may be social classes, they may be women versus men, they may be groupings based on ethnicity, and so on. Often they are groupings of a more 'local' sort, associated with a particular institution. (Recall the discussion in Chapter 2 of the relationship between institutional groupings and class, gender, etc. groupings.) For instance, in education, children, parents, and teachers, and groupings *within* each of these (based upon age, class, political allegiance, etc.) may in principle develop different educational ideologies. The situation in which they are likely to do so is where there is a struggle between them over institutional power.

Among the various forms which social struggle may take, it is *ideological struggle* that is of particular concern in the present context because ideological struggle pre-eminently takes place in language. We can think of such struggle as not only *in* language in the obvious sense that it takes place in discourse and is evidenced in language texts, but also *over* language. It is over language in the sense that language itself is a *stake* in social struggle as well as a *site* of social struggle. We saw this in discussing 'power behind discourse' in Chapter 3. Having the power to determine things like which word meanings or which linguistic and communicative norms are legitimate or 'correct' or 'appropriate' is an important aspect of social and ideological power, and therefore a focus of ideological struggle. Seeing existing language practices and orders of discourse as reflecting the victories and defeats of past struggle, and as stakes which are struggled over, is, along with the complementary concept of 'power behind discourse', a major characteristic of critical language

study (CLS) which differentiates it from descriptive 'mainstream' language study (in the terms of Ch. 1).

There are many different forms of ideological struggle in discourse, but here is a relatively simple example from a left-wing weekly, illustrating the use of *scare quotes*. Note that this is not a connected text – I have put together some extracts from a longer article by Zoë Tillotson.

#### *Thatcher's fortress family*

The left has been occupied of late grappling with shifts on the economic and industrial terrain. Too preoccupied, it seems, to focus any attention on another area that is also under reconstruction: the family.

Last week Thatcher, Gillick and the Mary Whitehouse posse closed ranks to launch a further onslaught on the 'permissive society'.

The demands for cheap, part-time semi-skilled labour in non-unionised industries is ensuring women's 'right to work'. Many women have no choice but to work, as men are increasingly unable to provide a 'family wage'.

However, as the state skulks off through the back door, one meddling hand remains to ensure that a 'good, moral' sex education, emphasizing a diet of 'self-restraint' and 'stable family life' will act as salvation to all potential hippies and homosexuals.

*Text 4.4 Source: 7 Days, June 1986*

What is the effect of putting expressions like *permissive society* in 'scare quotes' on the way in which the reader regards these expressions? Do 'scare quotes' invariably have the sort of effect they have here? Note your own reactions when they occur in the newspaper you generally read.

The effect in this case is I think to warn the reader that these expressions are problematic in some way. It dissociates the writer from these expressions, and makes it clear they belong to someone else: the writer's and 'assumed reader's' political opponents. In some cases, conversely, putting an expression in scare quotes is a way of endorsing it.

An interesting question is how readers know in a particular case whether to interpret this cue one way rather than the other. It is, again, evidently something to do with the implicit assumptions (MR) they draw upon in interpreting text. In the case of *the permissive society*, for instance, most readers of *7 Days* (a Communist Party publication) will be aware before they see the article that this expression belongs to an ideology alien to that of the newspaper, and so will unproblematically interpret it in a dissociating way. If they happened not to be aware of this, the immediate context would help them: since *posse* distances the writer of the article from Thatcher and company, one is likely to interpret the scare quotes which follow as also distancing.

Monitor your own practice, and try to work out what assumptions determine how you interpret scare quotes in different instances.

### Dominant and dominated discourse types

The struggle over language can manifest itself as a struggle between ideologically diverse *discourse types*. Recall that in Chapter 2 I introduced this term to refer to conventions, norms, codes of practice underlying actual discourse. Discourse types are ideologically particular and ideologically variable.

Why then a struggle between discourse types? What is at stake? What is at stake is the establishment or maintenance of one type as the *dominant* one in a given social domain, and therefore the establishment or maintenance of certain ideological assumptions as commonsensical. Let's take another example from the relatively transparent case of political discourse. In politics, each opposing party or political force tries to win general acceptance for its own discourse type as the preferred and ultimately the 'natural' one for talking and writing about the state, government, forms of political action, and all aspects of politics – as well as for demarcating *politics* itself from other domains. Think for example of the contrasting accounts of Britain's economic crisis given in the discourses of Thatcherite Toryism, Social Democracy (with left and right variants), Liberalism, and Communism since the late 1970s, and how the first of these came to dominate British politics in the early 1980s. (See Ch. 7 for texts and further discussion.) The stake is more than 'mere words'; it is controlling the contours of the political world, it is legitimizing policy, and it is sustaining power relations.

The primary domains in which social struggle takes place are the social institutions, and the situation types which each institution recognizes. Institutions tend to be rather complex structures, and a single institution is likely to involve various sorts of discourse in its various situation types. We can thus have a number of different sets of ideologically competing discourse types corresponding to these situation types. Nevertheless, there are important similarities and overlaps between the discourse types associated with a particular ideological position, not only across situation types within an institution, but also across institutions. See Chapter 7 for discussion.

What forms do dominance relationships between discourse types take? A dominated type may be in a relationship of *opposition* to a dominant one. The linguist Michael Halliday calls one type of oppositional discourse the *anti-language*. Anti-languages are set up and used as conscious alternatives to the dominant or established discourse types. Examples would be the language of the criminal underworld, or a social dialect which comes to be a consciously oppositional language – as may happen with the 'nonstandard' social dialect of a minority ethnic grouping, for example, or of a working-class community in one of the large cities.

Another possibility is for a dominated discourse type to be *contained* by a dominant one. A case in point is the way in which Thatcherite discourse has attempted to incorporate popular anti-bureaucratic and anti-State discourse by deflecting it towards a critique of the *welfare* state and of, in Thatcherite terms, 'state socialism'. (See Ch. 7 for details.) Where dominated discourses are oppositional, there will be pressure for them to be suppressed or eliminated; whereas containment credits them with a certain legitimacy and protection – with strings attached!

### Naturalization and the generation of common sense

One can think of the ultimate objective for a dominant discourse type as, in the words of the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, 'recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness'. To put the same point less tersely (and less elegantly), if a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary (in the sense of being one among several possible ways of 'seeing' things) and will come to be seen as *natural*, and legitimate because it is simply *the* way of conducting oneself. I will refer to this, as others have done, as the *naturalization* of a discourse type. Naturalization is a matter of degree, and the extent to which a discourse type is naturalized may change, in accordance with the shifting 'balance of forces' in social struggle.

What is the connection of naturalization to the ideological common sense I have been discussing? Naturalization is the royal road to common sense. Ideologies come to be ideological common sense to the extent that the discourse types which embody them become naturalized. This depends on the power of the social groupings whose ideologies and whose discourse types are at issue. In this sense, common sense in its ideological dimension is itself an *effect of power*. What comes to be common sense is thus in large measure determined by who exercises power and domination in a society or a social institution.

But in the naturalization of discourse types and the creation of common sense, discourse types actually appear to *lose* their ideological character. A naturalized type tends to be perceived not as that of a particular grouping within the institution, but as simply that of the institution itself. So it appears to be *neutral* in struggles for power, which is tantamount to it being placed outside ideology. One consequence is that the learning of a dominant discourse type comes to be seen as merely a question of acquiring the necessary skills or techniques to operate in the institution. An example would be learning how to operate discursively in the classroom when a child first goes to school, or learning at a later educational stage how to 'come across' well in an interview. The apparent emptying of the ideological content of discourses is, paradoxically, a fundamental ideological effect: ideology works

through disguising its nature, pretending to be what it isn't. When linguists take language practices at face value, as I suggested they did in Chapter 1, they help sustain this ideological effect.

Acknowledging the phenomenon of naturalization is tantamount to insisting upon a distinction between the superficial common-sense *appearances* of discourse and its underlying *essence*. But what then are we to make of the *explanations* people give, or can be persuaded by the analyst to give, of their own discourse practices? Explanations should be seen as *rationalizations* which cannot be taken at face value but are themselves in need of explanation. We can see rationalizations as part and parcel of naturalization: together with the generation of common-sense discourse practices comes the generation of common-sense rationalizations of such practices, which serve to *legitimize* them.

Think of the apparently most 'neutral' discourse types you know as effects of a process of naturalization, and of the explanations people give for them as rationalizations. Are there any types you believe to be *really* neutral?

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### Ideology and meaning

One dimension of 'common sense' is the meaning of words. Most of the time, we treat the meaning of a word (and other linguistic expressions) as a simple matter of fact, and if there is any question about 'the facts' we see the dictionary as the place where we can check up on them. For words we are all perfectly familiar with, it's a matter of mere common sense that they mean what they mean! I shall suggest below that common sense is as suspect here as elsewhere. But a brief discussion of two aspects of meaning in language will be helpful in the critique of commonsensical meaning: firstly, the variability of meaning, and secondly, the nature of *meaning systems*.

Because of the considerable status accorded by common sense to 'the dictionary', there is a tendency to generally underestimate the extent of variation in meaning systems within a society. For, although some modern dictionaries do attempt to represent variation, 'the dictionary' as the authority on word meaning is very much a product of the process of *codification* of standard languages and thus closely tied to the notion that words have fixed meanings. (Recall the discussion of standardization in Ch. 3.) It is easy enough to demonstrate that meanings vary between *social dialects* (discussed in Ch. 2), but they also vary *ideologically*: one respect in which discourse types differ is in their meaning systems. Let us take as an example a word which figures prominently in this book; the word *ideology* itself.

*Ideology* certainly does not give the impression of having a single fixed meaning – far from it! Indeed, it is not unusual to find words like *ideology* described as 'meaningless' because they have so many meanings. But the



situation is not quite that desperate: *ideology* does have a number of meanings, but it is not endlessly variable in meaning, and the meanings it has tend to cluster together into a small number of main 'families'.

I shall just identify two such families. One belongs particularly to the USA after the Second World War, though it is familiar enough today in Britain: *ideology* is interpreted as 'any social policy which is in part or in whole derived from social theory *in a conscious way*'. The other is in the Marxist tradition: *ideologies* are 'ideas which arise from a given set of material interests' in the course of the struggle for power. The definitions I have used here are from R. Williams 1976.

The point to stress is that the variable meanings of *ideology* are not just randomly generated, but themselves correspond to different ideological positions, and have been generated in the course of struggle between these positions. Thus the first of these senses of *ideology* labels Marxism as an ideology, along with fascism, and therefore uses 'the term which Marx and his followers had done so much to popularize' as 'a weapon *against* Marxism', in the words of David McLellan.

But, to come to the second of the aspects of meaning I referred to above, the meaning of a word is not an isolated and independent thing. Words and other linguistic expressions enter into many sorts of relationship – relationships of similarity, contrast, overlap and inclusion. And the meaning of a single word depends very much on the relationship of that word to others. So instead of the vocabulary of a language consisting of an unordered list of isolated words each with its own meaning, it consists of clusters of words associated with *meaning systems*.

Thus a full account of the variability of a word such as *ideology* would require comparison of *meaning systems*, not just word meanings. For instance, in the postwar American sense of *ideology* mentioned above, *ideology* is closely related to *totalitarianism*, and *totalitarian* and *ideological* are sometimes used as near synonyms. Furthermore, *totalitarianism* is a superordinate term which subsumes *fascism*, *communism*, *Marxism*, and so forth; the meaning system is structured so as to make *ideology* 'a weapon against Marxism'! In the Marxist meaning system, by contrast, *totalitarianism* does not figure at all, nor of course do we find *communism*/*Marxism* and *fascism* as co-homonyms of *totalitarianism*. For *homonym* and *synonym*, see Chapter 5, p. 96.

Let us now come back to the observation at the beginning of this section, that meaning appears as a matter of common sense. 'Common sense' in this case actually turns out to be something of an ideological sleight of hand! Imagine, for instance, *ideology* one day apparently coming to have a fixed meaning which one could check up on in 'the dictionary', and which was not contested. This could only mean that one 'side' in the struggle between meaning systems had gained undisputable dominance. The fixed meaning would in this sense be an *effect of power* – in fact the sort of ideological effect I have called *naturalization*.

But perhaps this is always the case with fixed meanings? What about an apparently quite unfavourable case like the word *nose*, in its most mundane anatomical sense of that part of the face which lies above the mouth and contains the nostrils? In contrast with *ideology*, there is (as far as I am aware) no variation in or struggle around the meaning of *nose*. Nevertheless, the meaning system which embodies the familiar classification of body parts *does* have some of the properties associated with naturalization. Firstly, there is an element of what Bourdieu called 'the misrecognition of arbitrariness', in that the meaning system seems to have a transparent and natural relationship to the body, as if it could be named in no other way. For instance, one can perfectly well imagine a meaning system which included a term for the groove between the nose and the upper lip, yet there happens to be no such term in English. Secondly, the meaning system is sustained by power: by the power of the relevant 'experts', medical scientists, and by the power of those sections of the intelligentsia (teachers, dictionary-makers, etc.) who are guarantors of this as of other elements of the codified standard language.

I shall assume that the fixed dictionary meanings that present themselves as simple matters of fact to common sense are always the outcome of a process of naturalization, in so far as the arbitrariness of meaning systems is hidden, though only in certain cases (*ideology* but not *nose*, for instance) is naturalization the outcome of ideological struggle and hence of particular interest in CLS.

What I have said about meaning so far applies to words and expressions as a resource for discourse, as the 'dictionary items' of particular discourse types, rather than the meanings of utterances in discourse. However, naturalization has parallel effects on both cases: both involve a *closure* or restriction of the plenitude of potential meanings. In the case of words and expressions thought of as dictionary items, this is a matter of the fixing of their meaning, as we have seen. In the case of an utterance in discourse, this is a matter of giving it the appearance of having only one possible interpretation, so that its meaning is given the appearance of being transparent. Think, for instance, of the meaning of *Can I help you?* uttered by a police officer standing at a reception counter in a police station to a person who has just entered the station. 'Obvious!', most people would say: the officer is inviting the person to give an account of her 'problem', her reason for being there, so that the officer can 'deal with' it. But *Can I help you?* could mean all sorts of quite different things: its meaning is closed, as transparently obvious, within the particular naturalized practice of this discourse of police/public encounters. (See the next section for discussion of the naturalization of practices, and a real example of *Can I help you?*)

As the beginning of the last paragraph suggests, there is a sense in which texts draw upon words and expressions, and meaning systems, as a 'resource'. However, texts don't merely instantiate prior meaning systems, they can also to varying degrees generate their own. Texts are in this sense ideologically creative. Text 4.5 is the first paragraph of a newspaper editorial.

### THE STILL SMALL VOICE OF TRUTH

Since the invasion of the Falklands on April 2, there has been the sound of many voices. *Yet at the heart of the matter, it was an evil thing, an injustice, an aggression.* Nobody disputes that. Even loyal Argentines — let alone Argentina's apologists — accept that force should not have been used to prosecute the Argentine case. But force was used; and it was not necessary. Beneath the roll of Argentine drums there are voices, however small, however still, which say that too, and they recognize that the unity achieved by the junta in Buenos Aires may only be a passing one, since it was born of an injustice. Unity in Britain, on the other hand, is based on recognition of the invasion as an incontrovertibly evil act. Obviously there have been disagreements about the method of coping with that evil, but there should be recognition that to compromise with evil — to appease it — is to run the risk of having to share responsibility for it. How we react to evil must therefore be conditioned by the need to compromise with it as little as possible, while taking care to see that our reaction to it does not compound the original evil.

Text 4.5 Source: *The Times*, 20 May 1982

What sort of meaning relationship is there between *invasion*, *evil*, *injustice*, *aggression*? How does their relationship in this text differ from their relationship in discourse types you can think of? Do you think this text can reasonably be described as 'ideologically creative'?

The second sentence, which I have italicized, is an *attributive* (SVC) sentence (see Chapter 5, p. 101), which establishes a 'member of a class: class' relationship between *the invasion of the Falklands*, and *evil (thing)*, *injustice* and *aggression*. The listing of these three expressions as *attributes* suggests a relationship of meaning equivalence between them. This happens because the word for a class can generally be used to refer to a member of the class, so in this case *evil*, *injustice* and *aggression* can be used interchangeably to refer to the invasion. In this special sense, we can say they are textual *synonyms*. But they are not synonymous in the meaning system of any discourse type I can think of. Ideologically, this suggests a

conflation of political/military acts with morality (*evil*) and legality (*injustice*); *aggression* is already a conventionalized partial expression of this conflation. In the last two sentences of the paragraph, this conflation seems to be 'put to use': the invasion is referred to as (*that*) *evil*, and this slides into general references to evil which are assumed to carry over to the invasion. The writer can thus say things that make no sense in terms of the invasion without appearing to be incoherent; notice for instance how peculiar it sounds if one replaces *evil* with *the invasion* in 'to compromise with evil — to appease it — is to run the risk of having to share responsibility for it', for instance.

What sort of purposes is ideological creativity in texts most commonly used for? Presumably in this text from *The Times*, it is being used politically, in something of a crisis, to blacken 'the enemy' and legitimize British military action. My impression is that ideological creativity is often associated with managing crises of one sort or another. Look for more examples, perhaps especially in the 'mass media', and try to check out this impression. You might also like to compare this text with the extract from *Mein Kampf* we had earlier.

### Interactional routines and their boundaries

Common sense gives us not only meaning systems, but also what we might call the 'interactional routines' associated with particular discourse types — the conventional ways in which participants interact with each other. For most of the time, we take part in buying-and-selling transactions in shops, interviews with social workers or clients, consultations with doctors or patients, and so forth, without giving a moment's thought to the conventional routines for relating to other participants which are built into these types of discourse. It's generally only when things go wrong that they draw themselves to our attention.

For example, this is the opening of an exchange in a police station between a man (M) who has just come into the station, and a policewoman (PW). A spaced dot indicates a short pause, a dash a longer one, round brackets indicate indistinguishable talk, and the series of dots shows that turn (8) has been curtailed. Do you agree that something appears to be going wrong? What?

- (1) PW: can I help you?
- (2) M: oh . yes . police?
- (3) PW: yes—
- (4) M: reckon you can help me can you? .
- (5) PW: yes
- (6) M: are you a police lady? good

- (7) PW: (unclear) what's the problem?  
 (8) M: I've got to . renew my car licence . . .

What appears to me to be going wrong is that M seems to find problematic things which are generally regarded as commonsensically given when we ask for information at a police station; that those behind the reception desk are indeed police, that all such people are competent to 'help' members of 'the public', that a woman at reception will indeed be a policewoman ('lady'). This could almost be a script for part of a comedy routine – laughter is one established way of handling those who refuse to accept the obvious! Look out for examples of comedy routines based upon that principle.

These common-sense assumptions underlie the normal interactional routine of the opening of exchanges in this type of situation: one expects PW's utterance (1) to be taken as eliciting a statement of the 'problem', which actually comes only in (8), as the first utterance on the part of M. It is evident from formal features of the text that the way the exchange actually develops is treated as problematic by both PW and M. PW for instance hesitates before her turn in (5), pronounces the *yes* in (5) with a marked 'surprised' tone (though that is not evident from the transcription), and finds it necessary (which it normally isn't) to ask M to identify 'the problem'; whereas M has a long hesitation before his turn in (4), and answers his own question in (6).

But could we not regard these textual traces of discomfort and of an attempt to 'repair' the exchange as evidence that participants do expect, as a matter of common sense, that an exchange will follow a 'normal course'? Notice that these common-sense expectations are institutionally specific: although for example there are generic 'family resemblances' between *interviews* across institutions, interviews and our expectations of them differ from a police station to a workplace to a university. For that reason, it will generally make sense to investigate language practices by reference to specific social institutions. (See Ch. 2 for discussion of social institutions, and Ch. 8 on cross-institutional genres such as the interview.)

What I have said generally about *naturalization* applies also here: there is no inherent reason why enquiries at police stations should be conventionally structured the way they are, there are conceivable if not actual alternatives, and the naturalization of a particular routine as *the* common-sense way of doing things is an effect of power, an ideological effect. An interesting aspect of cases like the extract above where things are going wrong is that the arbitrariness of practices and the way in which they sustain power, normally hidden, can become apparent. In this example, M asks *reckon you can help me can you*. This highlights the normal assumption of a general police competence to 'help' the public and responsibility for helping the public (rather than, say, keeping them in check), which underlies the way in which *Can I help you?* standardly elicits a statement of 'the problem' without further preliminaries. This assumption is an important element in relations between police and public, and in the legitimacy and power of the police.

Another way in which the arbitrariness of naturalized dominant interactional routines becomes apparent is when they are confronted or contrasted with other non-dominant practices. The following is an extract from a consultation between a doctor (D) and his patient (P), a woman alcoholic.

- P: she said that I could she thought that it might be possible to me for me to go to a council [flat  
 D: [right yes [yeah  
 P: [but she said it's a very em she wasn't pushing it because . my mother's got to sign  
 D: hm  
 a whole lot of things and e: . she said it's difficult and em  
 D: hm hm hm hm  
 . there's no rush over it . I I don't know whether . I mean one thing they say in AA is that you shouldn't change anything . for  
 D: hm  
 a year.  
 D: hm yes I think I think that's wise . I think that's wise (5-second pause) well look I'd like to keep you know seeing you keep . you know hearing how things are going from time to time if that's possible  
 P: yeah.  
 D: you know if you like to pop in once every em . two weeks or so  
 P: yes  
 D: and just let me know of how things are getting on

Text 4.6 Source: 'The Healing Arts', BBC2, 8 August 1986

This differs in a number of ways from what experience has taught me to expect from a doctor/patient consultation. Do you feel the same about it? If so, what are the differences?

These are the points that strike me: the patient is allowed to say what she has to say in her own time – notice the 5-second pause before D moves towards closing the consultation; D gives a great deal of evidence of listening to and taking in what P says – notice all the 'feedback' he gives her in the form of what are sometimes called *back-channels* (*hm, right, yes, yeah*); when D moves to a conclusion by talking about future consultations, he talks in a way that is minimally directive (*if you'd like to pop in*, etc.), and tries to interact with P by appealing to her understanding (*you know*) and giving her opportunities to respond to his 'proposals'. However, one comment I have had on this text is 'I thought the doctor sounded bored!', which underlines the fact that there might be various ways of interpreting D's behaviour.

This text is from a programme about the work of a leading member of the British Holistic Medical Association, which appears to operate as a pressure group within the National Health Service for 'holistic medicine', the treatment of the whole person rather than just the disease, and the use

where appropriate of methods of treatment from homeopathy and other forms of 'alternative' medicine. Struggles within medicine between pressure groups like this and the medical establishment can be expected to be in part struggles over language – over what sort of language medical consultations ought to be conducted in, for instance.

What experience do you have of varying interactional routines, of dominant and non-dominant types, in medicine? Think of differences in age and gender between doctors, and differences between orthodox practitioners and (if you have experience of them) homeopathic, naturopathic, or other 'alternative' practitioners.

Such struggles are also over *boundaries*, which brings us to the second part of the title of this section. One way of seeing the holistic medicine text is as a mixture of interactional routines associated with different discourse types – perhaps the medical consultation, counselling, and ordinary conversation. I suspect that from the point of view of establishment medicine and the dominant type of discourse in consultation, 'counselling talk' and conversational talk would be seen as having no place in the consultation proper. Doctors do of course chat with their patients, and counsel them; but my impression is that the chat tends to come as a demarcated preface or postface to the consultation proper; and for most doctors, counselling is probably also seen as something at least partially separated from consultation. These are suggestions which would need confirming or disconfirming through detailed research. The main point for present purposes is that the way in which different discourse types are related to each other, and the extent to which they are kept apart or mixed together, is another aspect of struggle over language. This connects back to what I was saying in Chapters 2 and 3 about *orders of discourse*: the way in which an order of discourse is structured – the relationships between constituent discourse types – is determined by power relations, and therefore contested in power struggles.

## Subjects and situations

The French philosopher Louis Althusser pointed to an important connection between common-sense assumptions (what he calls 'obviousnesses') about meaning, and common-sense assumptions about social identity or the 'subject' (a concept I introduced in Ch. 2): 'Like all obviousnesses, including those that make a word "name a thing" or "have a meaning" (therefore including the obviousness of the "transparency" of language), the "obviousness" that you and I are subjects – and that that does not cause any problems – is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect.' And Althusser adds that 'linguists and those who appeal to linguistics for various purposes

often run up against difficulties which arise because they ignore the action of the ideological effects in all discourses – including even scientific discourses'.

The 'transparency of language' is a general property which is illustrated for instance by what I said about meaning in the last section but one: the social processes constituting languages in general (and meanings in particular) are hidden beneath their appearance of being just naturally, commonsensically 'there'.

But are we to regard Althusser's analogy between the 'evident facts' of words having meaning and you and I being subjects as simply fortuitous? I don't think so. The point is that the ideological effect of one's 'subjecthood' being perceived as commonsensically given, rather than socially produced, is an effect that comes about pre-eminently in language and in meaning. That is, the socialization of people involves them coming to be placed in a range of *subject positions*, which they are exposed to partly through learning to operate within various discourse types; for, as I said in Chapter 2, each discourse type establishes its particular set of subject positions, which those who operate within it are constrained to occupy.

Subject positions are specific to discourse types, and ideologically variable. Consider again the holistic medicine text: one aspect of the contrast between medical consultations in the discourse of holistic medicine and those in the discourse of conventional medicine will be in the subject positions set up for patients. This is implicit in the comments I made about the text earlier: the contribution of the patient to the discourse is different from what one has learnt to expect in medical consultations, which suggests different subject positions for patients in the two types of discourse. Notice the power which is at stake in the struggle between discourses in this respect: it is the power to *create* the 'patient' in the image, so to speak, of the ideological ideal – for 'patients' are made what they are through the subject positions in which 'patienthood' is enacted. People sometimes feel the lack of an ideologically neutral term for referring to a person in receipt of medical care – for instance, when the term *patient* is used to refer to a woman in childbirth, inevitably portraying her as helpless, sick, and having things done to her rather than doing things (like giving birth!) herself.

Text 4.7 is another example, this time written, in which the issue is what subject position is created for the reader. What attributes do you think you would need to have to be an ideal example of the reader 'built into' this text?

The 'ideal reader' is looking for *success*, the capacity to *dominate* and *influence* others, an end to *boredom and frustration* . . . and so on. Part of the way in which this ideal reader is built into the text is to do with the nature of the *speech acts* (see Ch. 6, pp. 155–8) that are being performed here. They include what we might call *assurances* – for instance, the heading seems to contain the assurance that a command of good English will bring recognition, etc., and the two sentences following the sub-head *Command Respect* both contain assurances.

**How A Command Of Good English Will Bring You New Recognition And Success**

Language – the everyday act of speaking and writing, of reading and thinking – plays a much more important part in our daily lives than we usually realise. Indeed, it is a success “secret” of most outstanding men and women.

This booklet describes a new, unique way to improve your English, to increase your business and social success, to find new power of thought and expression, and to get more out of life.

**Command Respect**

You will learn in detail how to dominate and influence every situation simply by using the right words at the right time. What’s more, you can confidently look forward to ending boredom and frustration and gaining the attention and respect that win friends and influence people.

Yes, a command of good English is the most important single aid you could have in your search for success.

*Text 4.7 Source: Good English – The Language of Success, 1979*

One only normally gives people assurances that something will happen if they *want* it to happen. Assurances are like promises in this respect, though unlike the promiser the assurer is not committed to bringing whatever it is about personally. So, it is assumed that the reader *wants* ‘new recognition and success’, and so forth.

The social process of producing social subjects can be conceived of in terms of the positioning of people progressively over a period of years – indeed a lifetime – in a range of subject positions. The social subject is thus constituted as a particular configuration of subject positions. A consequence is that the subject is far less coherent and unitary than one tends to assume. Instead, we have to assume that social subjects are, in Gramsci’s words, ‘composite personalities’. Or as Foucault has put it, the subject is ‘dispersed’ among the various subject positions: ‘discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined’. This has, as Foucault points out,

profound implications for our tendency to see a speaker or writer as the *author* of her words: there is a sense, on the contrary, in which the speaker or writer is a *product* of her words. We must not take this too far, however: as I argued in Chapter 2, there is a dialectical process in discourse wherein the subject is both created and creative. See further Chapter 7.

What is the import of Althusser’s designation of the ‘obviousness’ that one is a subject as ‘an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect’? It is I think partly that people are not conscious of being socially positioned as subjects, and standardly see their own subjective identities as somehow standing outside and prior to society. Such ideological misperceptions are the basis for various idealist theories of human society which are built around the ‘individual’ as pre-social, and which try to see societies as emanating from (properties of) the individual rather than the other way round. In calling this the ‘elementary’ ideological effect, Althusser is suggesting that constituting subjects is what ideology is all about – *all* ideology is in one way or another to do with positioning subjects.

What I have said about the subjects in discourse applies also to the *situations* of discourse. We also take the situations in which we discourse as ‘obviousnesses’ which cause no problems. Yet, again, far from those situations existing prior to and independently of discourse as we tend to commonsensically assume, they are in a sense the products of discourse, particular discourse types and orders of discourse having their own particular inventories of situation types, and there being consequently different ideologically contrastive inventories.

Both the subject positions and the situation types of dominant discourse types are (like the meanings of their words, and the properties of their interactional routines) liable to be *naturalized*, and we have now reached a point in the argument where it will I hope be apparent just how much is at stake in struggles in, and especially over, language, and just how much is to be gained through the achievement of naturalization. Consider the relationship between naturalization and the three ways in which I claimed power constrained the practice of others in Chapter 3. The naturalization of the meanings of words is an effective way of constraining the contents of discourse and, in the long term, knowledge and beliefs. So too is the naturalization of situation types, which helps to consolidate particular images of the social order. The naturalization of interactional routines is an effective way of constraining the social relations which are enacted in discourse, and of constraining in the longer term a society’s system of social relationships. Finally, the naturalization of subject positions self-evidently constrains subjects, and in the longer term both contributes to the socialization of persons and to the delimitation of the ‘stock’ of social identities in a given institution or society. Naturalization, then, is the most formidable weapon in the armoury of power, and therefore a significant focus of struggle.

### 'Making trouble': foregrounding common sense

In Chapter 9, there will be a discussion of the complex issues involved in the relationship between CLS, (self-)consciousness and social emancipation, and I do not want to pre-empt that discussion too much here. However, given the emphasis I have placed in this chapter on the backgrounded and unconscious nature of ideological common sense, this is perhaps an appropriate place to say something about how common sense can be *foregrounded*, which it must be if people are to become self-conscious about things which they unreflectingly take for granted.

We saw in the section *Interactional routines and their boundaries* that one situation in which the common-sense elements of discourse are brought out into the open is when things go wrong in discourse. CLS can correspondingly focus upon instances of communication breakdown and miscommunication, and instances where people attempt to 'repair' their discourse, as a way of highlighting and foregrounding discursive common sense.

Another situation where common-sense elements are 'spontaneously' foregrounded is where there is a sufficiently large social or cultural divide between participants in an exchange, or between participants in and observers of an exchange, for the arbitrariness and social relativity of the common sense of one to be evident to others. It follows from what has been said in this chapter about ideological variability and struggle that this happens extensively within as well as across societies, and we saw one example in the Hitler text. Again, the analyst can build upon this, focusing upon ideological struggle in discourse, or exposing people to samples of talk or writing which they are likely to find ideologically alien.

A third possibility is the deliberate disturbance of common sense through some form of intervention in discourse. The experimental tasks which the sociologist Harold Garfinkel assigned to his students are an example. Here is an excerpt from the student accounts of these experiments:

The subject was telling the experimenter, a member of the subject's car pool, about having a flat tire while going to work the previous day.

S: I had a flat tire.

E: What do you mean, you had a flat tire?

She appeared momentarily stunned. Then she answered in a hostile way: 'What do you mean "What do you mean?" A flat tire is a flat tire. That is what I meant. Nothing special. What a crazy question!'

(Garfinkel 1967: 42)

The responses of subjects to experimenters' attempts to estrange the common-sense world of discourse show just how solid and real that world is for people. As we can see in this example, people quickly become incredulous,

irritated, and angry when this world is disturbed, and may well conclude that whoever disturbs it is playing the fool, or mentally ill. This is therefore a technique to use cautiously!

### Summary

Let me now summarize what I have been saying in this chapter. I started from the *common-sense* nature of discourse, and suggested that the *coherence* of discourse is dependent on discursive common sense. I then claimed that discursive common sense is *ideological* to the extent that it contributes to sustaining unequal power relations, directly or indirectly. Ideology, however, is not inherently commonsensical: certain ideologies acquire that status in the course of ideological struggles, which take the linguistic form of struggles in social institutions between ideologically diverse discourse types. Such struggles determine dominance relations between them and their associated ideologies. A dominant discourse is subject to a process of *naturalization*, in which it appears to lose its connection with particular ideologies and interests and become the common-sense practice of the institution. Thus when ideology becomes common sense, it apparently ceases to be ideology; this is itself an ideological effect, for ideology is truly effective only when it is disguised.

I went on to discuss naturalization in several dimensions of discursive common sense. In the case of the *meanings of linguistic expressions* and meaning systems, naturalization was shown to result in a closure of meaning, reflected in the apparent fixity of the 'dictionary' meanings of words, and in the apparent transparency of utterance meanings. In the case of *interactional routines*, the self-evidentness of conventional (and ultimately arbitrary) ways of interacting is an effect of naturalization, as also is the way these are related and demarcated. And, finally, in the case of the *subjects and situations* of discourse, their self-evidentness and apparent independence of discourse are illusory effects of naturalization, for they are both to a significant degree *products* of discourse. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of ways in which ideological common sense can be foregrounded.

### References

For discussion of the 'common-sense world of everyday life', see Garfinkel 1967. There is a helpful discussion of inferencing, and its relation to automatic 'gap-filling', in Chapter 7 of Brown and Yule 1983. On ideology, see: Althusser 1971, McLellan 1986, Eagleton 1991, Zizek 1994, van Dijk 1998. Gramsci's remarks on common

sense and ideology are to be found in Gramsci 1971. See also Therborn 1980 (quoted on p. 73). Hall 1982 is useful on ideology and naturalization. On 'anti-languages' see the paper with that title in Halliday 1978. There are valuable treatments of many of the themes of this chapter in Bourdieu 1977; Pecheux 1982; and J. B. Thompson 1984. On discourse and ideology in French discourse analysis, see G. Williams 1999. Althusser's statement about meaning and subjects comes from Althusser 1971. Foucault's comments on the subject appear in Foucault 1982. The alternative wordings of psychiatric practices reproduced for Question 1 are taken from Edelman 1974. On 'face' see Brown and Levinson 1978, Thomas 1995.

## 5

### Critical discourse analysis in practice: description

The textual samples in the preceding chapters have contained quite a range of linguistic features – features of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation (recall the 'scare quotes' example in the last chapter), turn-taking, types of speech act and the directness or indirectness of their expression, and features to do with the overall structure of interactions – as well as examples of non-linguistic textual features ('visuals'). I hope that by this stage in the book, readers without a background in language analysis will appreciate how a close analysis of texts in terms of such features can contribute to our understanding of power relations and ideological processes in discourse.

But text analysis is just one part of discourse analysis. Recall Fig. 2.1 (on p. 21), which identified text, interaction, and social context as three elements of a discourse, and the corresponding distinction I drew between three stages of critical discourse analysis; *description* of text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction, and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context.

In this chapter and the next, I shall present a procedure for critical discourse analysis, based upon these three stages. This chapter deals with description, and Chapter 6 with interpretation and explanation. This division of labour accords with the contrast I drew in Chapter 2 between description on the one hand, and interpretation and explanation on the other, in terms of the sorts of 'analysis' they involve. And there are corresponding differences in the organization of the two chapters: the sort of analysis associated with the description stage allows this chapter to be organized as a mini reference manual, whereas Chapter 6 is more discursive. However, as I pointed out in Chapter 2, there is a sense in which description presupposes interpretation, so this contrast, while convenient in procedural terms, should not be given too much weight. Readers will also find that some topics (including *speech acts* and *presupposition*) which might be expected in the description