

**Voices in a university: a critical exploration of black students' responses to institutional discourse.**

**Volume I**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

**This thesis, unless indicated otherwise, is my own work and has not been submitted at any other time for another degree.**

**Jennifer Anne Clarence-Fincham**

## **Abstract**

The context for this study is the period leading up to and the four years since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. It is a critical exploration of black students' responses to university discourses as they begin their degrees, and an analysis of the extent to which Critical Language Awareness can be used to facilitate a greater understanding of institutional conventions and practices. It includes a brief consideration of students' school experiences and then explores their perceptions of the university as a whole as well as of individual texts. The way in which language encodes asymmetrical power relations and is used to construct students' subjectivities within the institution is of central concern.

The research methodology adopted here is critical action research. The study consists of two research cycles, a short pilot study and a longer eight week language teaching programme. This second cycle was carried out in 1991 at the University of Natal during a time marked by unprecedented political fluidity and the establishment of new institutional and social structures. The impact of these changes has been felt at every level as racial separation, uniformity and ethnic homogeneity, which were once dominant social norms, have been replaced by the movement towards an integrated social order defined by its diversity, difference, and multiplicity.

Because the research process is inseparable from its socio-political context, a theoretical perspective which attempts to theorise multiplicity and contradiction has been adopted here. Insights from postmodern thought are therefore central to this work and have facilitated the interrogation and, at times, the rewriting of many aspects of critical social theory, critical

pedagogy and critical action research.

The immediate context for this study is *Learning, Language and Logic*, a first-year course whose primary aim is the acquisition of academic literacy. Over a period of four years, the two action research cycles were developed and integrated into the curriculum. The first was a short intervention during which students analysed three university texts and the second, central cycle was an eight week programme which introduced them to the central principles of Critical Language Awareness. It was designed to provide students entering the university with the opportunity to explore unfamiliar aspects of the university environment and to analyse a range of texts drawn from its discourses. The primary method of analysis of the data was Critical Discourse Analysis but a content analysis of some of the data was also undertaken.

The results of this research provide a strong indication that the integration of the principles of Critical Language Awareness into a first year course in academic literacy adds a crucial dimension to students' understanding of the university environment. It provides them with linguistic insights from which they can further develop the ability to analyse their educational context, to respond critically to academic texts and to understand the roles that they can play within the university.

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## **List of abbreviations and acronyms**

<b>ANC</b>	<b>African National Congress</b>
<b>ASP</b>	<b>Academic Support Programme</b>
<b>BTF</b>	<b>Broad Transformation Forum</b>
<b>CDA</b>	<b>Critical Discourse Analysis</b>
<b>CLA</b>	<b>Critical Language Awareness</b>
<b>CLS</b>	<b>Critical Language Study</b>
<b>EAP</b>	<b>English for Academic Purposes</b>
<b>ESL</b>	<b>English as a Second Language</b>
<b>L2</b>	<b>Second Language</b>
<b>RDP</b>	<b>Reconstruction and Development Programme</b>
<b>SAIRR</b>	<b>South African Institute for Race Relations</b>
<b>VCR</b>	<b>Vice-Chancellor's Review</b>

# Chapter One

## The Social and Institutional Context

### 1.1 Introduction

This study is a critical exploration of black South African students' responses to the discourses of the University of Natal during their first year of study and to the ways in which they are linguistically positioned and constructed within the institution. It was undertaken during a period in South Africa which is witnessing what are arguably the most fundamental socio-political changes in its history, - the dismantling of apartheid structures in favour of a new democratic order. They are changes which have fundamentally displaced past political and social injustices which were based largely on notions of homogeneity within ethnic groups and apparently unassailable Afrikaner dominance in favour of an emphasis on pluralities, diversity and difference (see 2.1 and 2.4). Their impact has been felt at every level of the society, ranging from macro-political re-structuring to the re-positioning and re-definition of smaller social units, like churches, schools, universities and sports clubs.

There are numerous accounts which document the movement from this oppressive and unjust socio-political order towards the democratic structures which are now in their infancy in this country (Kane-Berman 1993; Roberts 1996; SAIRR 1995). A crucial date was February 2, 1990, which saw the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and soon after that, the release of Nelson Mandela. 1994 brought the first democratic election in the country's history which was preceded by a groundswell of oppositional politics and followed by intricate processes of ongoing social, educational and political redress. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was set in motion in many interrelated spheres, including labour relations, health and education (ANC 1994a; Pieterse 1995) and, for the first time, courts were bound by a Constitution and Bill of Rights (1996). At every level, the country moved, and is moving, towards major restructuring, with the consequent reformulations in each sphere impacting

directly or indirectly on the shifts in others.

The relationship between these processes can be analysed from several different perspectives; here they are viewed through an intertextual, linguistic lens (Bakhtin 1981; Fairclough 1992b; Kristeva 1986, see also 3.3.2). This provides an apt illustration of the argument that language can never be a transparent and neutral reflection of an outside reality but is always intricately linked with power structures in a given society and the means via which those structures are perpetuated or contested (Fairclough 1995; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fiske 1994; Janks and Ivanič 1992; Vološinov 1973). The renaming, or re-presenting processes in this country are a crucial indication of changing ideological underpinnings; the major political shift from an illegal, apartheid government to democratically elected representatives precipitated lexical changes which represent a complex set of often conflictual and contesting social processes. Airports, for example, have been renamed so that they no longer stand as monuments to the memory of “fathers of South African nationalism”, streets have been named after figures who were central in the establishment of democracy and businesses are engaged in processes of organisational restructuring that will better reflect the social and material realities of the country. As isolated events, these naming practices have little significance except at a local, immediate level; as part of the construction of a new social fabric, however, they play a key role and make a significant contribution to the overall ethos of a society in transition.

## **1.2 Educational Transformation in South Africa**

### **1.2.1 Introduction**

In the educational sphere, restructuring and redefining is evidenced everywhere; not only are we constantly responding to the challenges of our own new order but at the same time are attempting to respond to aspects of broader trends. Globalisation, for example, which “refers to the intensification of world-wide social relations and to multiple changes in the economy, culture and communications of advanced economies” (South Africa: Draft white paper on higher education 1997: 10) is having a decisive impact, as do international trends in education which



call for the introduction of quality assurance systems and the provision of life-long learning for all (Ngara 1998).

These external processes, however, need to be balanced against the demands of the local environment which pose a different set of questions, which are “skewed and deepened by our peculiar historical and political context” (Luckett 1994: 333). Most crucial for the South African schooling system, for example, is the challenge presented by the task of reconstituting seventeen previously separate education departments into a unified body which offers the possibilities of equitable access to educational provision. The shift is not simply logistic; it represents a crucial dismantling of a structure which symbolised the maintenance and perpetuation of apartheid ideology (Cross and Chisholm 1990; Enslin 1984; Kallaway 1986) and has been described as “fragmented, unequal and undemocratic . . . It has resulted in the destruction, distortion or neglect of the human potential of our country, with devastating consequences for social and economic development” (ANC 1994b: 2). Both local and national initiatives are framed by the debate around what it means to be African, what it means to work and teach in an African institution and what, for example, “Africanisation” processes imply for educational initiatives, programme and curriculum development (Luckett 1994; Moulder 1991; Ngara 1998). In addition, as part of the process of redress, the implementation of affirmative action policies, which itself repositions people in relation to each other within a given institution is also of central concern, not only in education but throughout the public sector (Castle 1994).

It has already been noted that the processes of re-naming and redefinition filter through the entire social structure. While government structures re-position themselves in relation to the electorate, so smaller units develop alongside them, echoing similar procedures. In universities, for example, broad processes of transformation continue; in most historically white universities academic development programmes designed to meet the communicative and academic needs of second language students were set in place well before the unbanning of the ANC.<sup>1</sup> More recently, there

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1. Under the apartheid government, “The Extension of Universities Act 45” of 1959 was passed. This Act prevented black students from entering white South African universities unless they had a special permit. The “Universities Amendment Act 83” of 1983, still under apartheid rule, overturned this ruling and introduced a quota system which allowed a greater number of black students entry into previously white universities. The quota system was opposed by white university administrators and was largely ignored.

has been a strong move towards both racial and gender equity which is reflected in the development of alternative admission and employment policies and also in the development of new, more relevant curricula, many of these now conceptualised as open learning programmes with the needs of distance students of paramount importance (Bawa and Bulman 1996). In addition, in some institutions, small groups of people are specifically appointed to engage in often controversial debate about what constitutes politically and educationally appropriate naming practices which more accurately reflect the political and material realities of the country. At the University of Natal, for example, it has been explicitly stated that “all symbols that have offensive colonial or apartheid connotations shall be changed through a process of consultation with interested parties” (University of Natal: Broad Transformation Forum (BTF) Founding Document 1996a: 1). The Naming of Facilities Committee has consequently been redesignated to “examine the existing policy and procedures in respect of the naming of facilities and the *renaming* of facilities” (University of Natal: BTF minutes August 1996b: 3).

Relationships between constituencies *within* the university are also shifting with various groups being named and re-named as social and educational provision changes. A good example of this process as it applies to first year, second-language students is captured in an early conference paper entitled, “Handicap or deficit or deprivation or disadvantage or underpreparation or what”? Some problems in theorising an ASP course” (Moll 1987). This well reflects the way in which naming practices have moved through a series of stages which themselves reflect changing ideological perspectives; it gives a clear indication of the attempts by some universities to highlight the importance of how students are positioned in language within the institution and to sensitise themselves to the needs and aspirations of a diverse student population. Student groups (usually identifiable in racial terms as well as through different languages) have also been set against each other, they have been dichotomised, first as traditional versus non-traditional, then as prepared versus underprepared (but see Masenya 1994, who argues that it is the institutions rather than the students who are underprepared) and more latterly as mainstream versus non-mainstream students. With the rapidly changing student population, however, the

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It is as a result of this historical context that South African universities were referred to as “historically black” or “historically white” and previously white universities were labelled “open”.

accuracy and the appropriateness of these categories have become far less assured.

There is no doubt that the search for appropriate naming practices continues. Two further papers evidence this. The first is Boughey's 1994 paper entitled "New meanings for new words: defining and developing academic literacy at South African universities" and the second is a more recent offering by Thesen (1997) entitled "Voices, discourse and transition: in search of new categories in EAP". Each highlights, from a slightly different perspective, the ongoing process of definition and re-definition which so clearly marks the way in which different constituencies within the university are linguistically inscribed.

### **1.2.2 South African Universities and the Challenge to Transform**

Like many other initiatives in the country, these transitional university processes are couched in the language of social and political transformation. In the educational domain, transformation is a key concept in numerous documents and articles (see, for example, Desai 1991; Ngara 1998; Pillay 1991; Wolpe 1991); it is a contested term in many debates but in all of them it is a concept which underlies the development of new initiatives and drives the thinking of progressive South African educators. As early as 1987, when Professor Jakes Gerwel was installed as Rector of the University of the Western Cape, his installation address signalled the reality of the transitional process, challenging South African society generally and educational institutions in particular. He spoke of a society characterised by the "terminal crisis" (1987: 79) of apartheid with all its complex, interrelated implications which, he claimed, should be reflected "not in the mere form of multi-racial political arrangements but more fundamentally in the social reorganisation of power and privilege" (1987: 78). Referring to the universities in particular, he warned that "the leisurely contemplation which had been the hallmark of university life" and which was the "product and function of a specific political culture" (1987: 81) was rapidly being displaced by a different ethos. He linked the changing ethos within universities directly to the differently constituted student population some sectors of which do not share and are often alienated from the political culture informing and shaping university life. He argued that

The old problem of the connection between theory and practice will be carried as a real problem into universities: students feeling themselves intimately and directly involved by the practice of social and political discrimination will, one can expect, continue to seek to divert their academic and intellectual life to action related to those aspects of their lives. And this does pose problems and challenges to the university. (1987: 81)

For Gerwel, the university could “either be oppositional to the historical movement of our society or be a facilitating agent”. He believes that

The integration of academic and intellectual life with and the development of it out of the reality of people's social experience and world is essential both for the order of our functioning and, more importantly, for the vitality and quality of our intellectual environment. (1987: 79)

A few months earlier, Vusi Khanyile, the chairperson of what was then The National Education Crisis Committee, in his opening address to the 1986 Academic Support Programme conference on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal, concurred with this broad view. He insisted that universities cannot divorce themselves from broader socio-political struggles and, in the light of this, issued a range of challenges to South African universities wishing to play a role in the process of transition. Firstly, he argued, universities should engage in research that facilitates the development of alternative course content and teaching methods which can be implemented in schools. Secondly, they should critique and transform their own accountability structures and create new ones which facilitate consultation with the broader community. Thirdly, universities should be involved in

Evaluating their own courses, entrance requirements and Academic Support Programmes in order to turn their institutions into centres of relevant and accessible “People’s Education”, which certainly does NOT mean academically inferior education, but rather the sort of education that will serve South Africa’s most pressing needs and become part of creating a new society. (1986: 4)

Khanyile insisted that what is required from universities is an institutional response rather than one from concerned individuals only. This response, he argued

will necessitate a reassessment of priorities and a reallocation of resources, based on

an understanding that the actions of the universities in this critical transition phase could very well play a determining role in the future of education in South Africa. (1986: 5)

Having acknowledged that those involved in academic development were amongst the first to recognise the need for what he termed “transformed structures of accountability” (1986: 1) at universities, Khanyile warned that the route towards this transformation would not be easy because

it will require becoming part of a pioneering process that challenges many of the traditional concepts and structures of tertiary education in South Africa. And these will be very jealously guarded by powerful forces and vested interests inside and outside the university . . . But, unless that task is undertaken, the universities will miss the historic moment that has arrived for them to play a creative and constructive role in the process of radical transformation that South Africa has irrevocably entered. (1986: 1)

Even a cursory glance at the comments from these two educators provides some indication of the range and complexity of the debates currently central to university discourse. These are the role of universities in broad social transformation, the facilitation of appropriate and democratic relationships between the universities and the communities they serve and the role of applied research as well as the development of relevant teaching methodology, most especially in the field of curriculum development. The evaluation and function of what were then termed Academic Support Programmes, now re-named Academic Development, are central concerns as are the debates around student admission policies and academic standards.

### **1.2.3 “Quality with Equity” at the University of Natal**

In the face of the need to redefine its role in the rapidly-changing and challenging socio-political South African context, the administrators of the University of Natal, after discussion with many of its constituencies, drew up a document entitled *The Role in Society of The University of Natal: 1989 Onwards*. This text (hereafter referred to as the Mission Statement) attempts to articulate the university’s role and commitment in the next few decades. It begins by locating the Mission

Statement in the context of broad apartheid policies:

The Government has continued to implement its racially discriminatory policies and practices, and has continued to curtail a wide range of human freedoms and civil liberties. The University of Natal has continued to protest these governmental actions and policies and has continued to press for the removal of the constraints upon the achievement of a democratic, free and just society for all the people of the country. (1989: 1)

Against this backdrop, the university is then defined as an institution which has

a responsibility to the specific society which makes its existence possible. In that society the university is pre-eminently the institution directed toward change and innovation. It has a major function and responsibility to question the way in which society operates, to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness and justness of its social, political and economic institutions. The more representative of society the university is, in its structure, staff and student body, the more effectively it will perform its function. (1989: 1-2)

The rest of the document attempts to outline guidelines for the achievement of these aims. A crucial underpinning acknowledgement is that while the university needs “considerable adaptation . . . to its new role,” this should not be “simply the adaptation of Black entrants to the ways of a White-styled university” (1989: 5). Implied here is a tacit agreement with Vilakazi and Tema who assert that the correct starting point for an analysis of South African universities

should be the realization that the problem is, first and foremost, not the black student, but the whiteness of the university itself. It is this whiteness of the university which . . . makes it tremendously difficult for the student to move quickly, or leap, over the educational deficiencies of his or her past. (1991: 129)

They also stress that

from the standpoint of the fate of the average black student, the “whiteness” or “blackness” of a university is not decided only by the proportion of whites to blacks in the student body, but also, and above all, by the proportion of whites to blacks in the *power* structure of the university. (1991: 129)

The Mission Statement is also compatible with Moulder's view that there needs to be a shift away from what he terms "the geriatric cultures of the northern hemisphere" (1991: 115) and attention given to problems "that have their roots and their significance in Africa as, for example, American academics give to problems that have their roots and their significance in America" (1991: 116).

In the Mission Statement, the University of Natal identifies a range of potentially far-reaching changes in almost every aspect of its endeavour. It commits itself to changing the racial composition of the student body so that it accurately represents the population of the country as a whole. This also applies to the composition of the administrative and teaching staff. Closely linked to this objective is an explicit commitment to provide relevant and appropriate educational provision for the community it serves:

In the South African context the community we serve is indeed a complex one. There is a wide range in social, economic, political, cultural and educational circumstances. Thus in its attempts to fulfil its role in society, the University of Natal must address a complex range of needs and must be committed to satisfying those needs through specific development, teaching and research programmes. (1989: 13)

The Mission Statement also touches briefly on the vexed question of the relationship between "universality and exclusivity on the one hand, and particularity and egalitarianism on the other" and argues that

The University of Natal finds no contradiction in wishing, on the one hand, to recognise its traditional influences, to continue to search for new knowledge, to preserve the traditional academic values and to restrict its membership (staff and students) to those with high intellectual capacity; and, on the other hand, to recognise the need for relevance, to address the particular economic, social and cultural needs of its community and to do so with equal commitment. (1989: 13)

The section "Policies for the Future" (1989: 5) also includes brief discussion around the autonomy of the university and the complex issue of academic freedom as well as the centrally important, closely related notions of equal opportunity and affirmative action. In addition, the need to find methods of selecting both students and staff in terms of their potential rather than

their past experience is highlighted. In this regard, the University of Natal's Teach-Test-Teach Programme, an alternative admission programme, which selects students on their potential to succeed rather than on past performance, is of particular note. It is argued that affirmative action

is not a contradiction of the concept of Equal Opportunities, but rather a mechanism for implementing equal opportunity on the basis of potential to succeed rather than on past performance where the opportunities for performing have been unequal. (1989: 14-15)

Since the formulation of the Mission Statement, the university has endeavoured, under increasing educational, political and financial pressures, to set in place procedures which assist with the complex task of implementing the far-reaching restructuring required of the institution. In 1994, a substantial document based on university-wide consultation and entitled "Planning Guidelines 1994-1998" was issued by the Vice-Chancellor's Review (Phase II). In this, there is a clear development of the fundamental tenets of the Mission Statement, as the implications for the adoption of a "Quality with Equity" strategy for the university are explicated:

The University of Natal has a strategy of Quality with Equity. It dedicates its excellence in teaching, research and development to progress through reconstruction. It serves South Africa and the KwaZulu-Natal region in particular, by delivering quality teaching which enables students from all backgrounds to realise their academic potential and to obtain degrees of continuing international standard. It undertakes quality research to national and international standards and provides development services which meet clients' needs. (University of Natal; VCR, Planning Guidelines 1994: 2)

Now, since 1996, the Broad Transformation Forum (BTF) has been established to serve as a central body which represents all the university's constituencies as well as interested outside bodies. Its founding document is framed by a statement of intent in which the University of Natal once again

reaffirms its rejection of all structures created to establish and maintain apartheid: it further reaffirms its rejection of all policies and practices that promote and sustain injustice and inequity . . . and commits itself to transforming itself tirelessly so as to ensure that it reflects the demographic composition of South Africa in all its decision making structures. (1996a: 1)



The BTF mediates all transformation related matters within the university and, although its task is not without conflict and contestation, it has been accorded significant power within the university community which should, in future years, further facilitate many of the complex and challenging transformational procedures which are already underway.

#### **1.2.4 The Emergence of Academic Development**

In both The Mission Statement (1989) and The Vice-Chancellor's Review (1994) the provision of "special academic support programmes . . . so that . . . students can make good their educational deficiencies and so be given the best possible opportunity of realising their potential for success" (1989: 15) was identified as a specific need which is central to the university's transformation process and part of its affirmative action policy.

At the University of Natal, as at most of the other historically white English-speaking universities, these programmes, which are now collectively referred to as Academic or Educational Development, have been developed in the context of a range of intersecting socio-political and educational factors, the complexity of which has been increasingly acknowledged over the past decade. In a lecture given on the Pietermaritzburg campus in 1990, Hofmeyr identified this developmental process in Academic Development country-wide. She noted that

Initially it was thought disadvantages were rooted in inferior schooling but today there is a perception of the host of problems embedded in the structural violence of apartheid and under-development. Research has shown that non-academic factors such as financial assistance, transport, housing, counselling and extra curricular activities are crucial to the success of black students. (*Natal Witness*, 3 March 1990: 5)

In tandem with this more complex analysis of the situation, an ideological shift has emerged as "the problem" has been relocated, in simple terms, from underprepared students to the institutions ill-equipped to provide for them.

These programmes vary widely between and within universities, this depending on the particular

needs and perceptions of institutions, faculties and departments. At the University of Natal, some faculties provide bridging courses, others additional tutorials, which are either integrated into a mainstream course or “added on” to the normal requirements. Increasingly, however, the importance of integrating Academic Development into mainstream courses, of bringing development initiatives into the core (Muller 1988) rather than relegating them comfortably to the periphery, has been recognised.

On the Pietermaritzburg campus, a first year, credit-bearing course, *Learning, Language and Logic*, was introduced in 1984 as part of the Academic Development Programme<sup>2</sup>. It is offered through the Department of Applied Language Studies, is available to students from the faculties of Arts, Social Science, Commerce and Science, and has been developed to equip them to communicate effectively and powerfully in a wide range of university situations. The Critical Language Studies Programme, which is at the centre of this thesis, has been developed and implemented in the context of this course.

One of the fundamental questions facing Academic Development Programmes is the extent to which they are part of the transformative process or whether they help to perpetuate traditional educational hegemony, even if unconsciously. In this thesis, it is argued that in order to facilitate transformation of the institution, Academic Development Programmes should categorically reject the deficit models of the past, where the students are constructed as being in need of remediation. They should not concentrate on changing students to fit the institution but instead, as one of their primary purposes, should critique and question the educational assumptions underpinning it. Scott argues forcefully that if Academic Support Programmes fail to do this they will, rightly, be charged, not only with “failing to promote essential change in the university but in fact serving to inhibit it” (1986: 19). He insists that

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2. Interestingly, this course is also part of a significant restructuring and renaming process. Recent student evaluations of the newly developed distance-based version of *Learning, Language and Logic*, revealed that many students perceive the original name to belong to the “old order” and therefore to represent a deficit view of second language speakers which marginalises them. They also feel that the name does not adequately reflect the nature of the course. As a result of these two criticisms, it has been agreed that from the beginning of 1998, the course will be offered as *Academic Communication Studies*.

if the real work of the ASP is relegated to a permanently peripheral role, if academic support is limited to being a survival kit for a minority of disadvantaged students who manage to gain admission to first year, then it will be trapped in a “reformist” operation that could serve to enable the university to respond in a limited but visible way to the inequities of our society without bringing about the kind of change that will make the institution truly open, non-racial and accessible to all sectors of the Community. (1986: 19)

Scott identifies several ways in which Academic Development can contribute towards progressive change within the universities. These include the facilitation of innovative admissions policies and the provision of Academic Development Programmes which take full account of the complexities of the educational experience of black students. He argues that there are two major requirements of academic development, the first that they should “make the university more accessible to disadvantaged communities” and the second that they should “enable disadvantaged students to obtain a foundation for real competence and independence in their studies” (1986: 24). Essential characteristics of an Academic Development Programme include an emphasis on skills and general conceptual development, the development of positive approaches to learning, the provision for social adjustment and the facilitation of an awareness of the social context in which students find themselves.

One of the ways in which the university can be made more accessible to students that is not explicitly addressed by Scott, is through the exposure to and critique of the social construction and ideological underpinnings of institutional practice. It is argued, for example, by Frame that

the aim of educational development work is . . . to challenge some of the assumptions which currently underpin ideas about education at university, and in this process to empower both staff and students to educate and be educated in the light of a changed conceptualisation of education. (1992: 19)

In his installation address, Gerwel asserted that this challenge would be instigated largely by students who entered the institution with already developed, alternative views about the nature of university education, who could readily challenge underlying, naturalised assumptions. This may well be true of many students in the Western Cape who view political struggles in South Africa as being waged against a monolithic state by the black, opposing masses. The results of

this research, however, suggest a more complex set of dynamics in which this claim is by no means always substantiated. The students who participated in this programme, despite the development in some of a critical stance in relation to their school experiences, did not, on the whole, enter the university intent upon contesting traditionally accepted institutional practice. There is no doubt that many changes are brought about by student opposition but this occurs only once students have been interpellated as contesting voices and groups. Indeed, it is argued in this thesis that the facilitation of precisely this process of interpellation, the development of an interrogative relationship between students and the university is a prerequisite for fundamental institutional change and should be one of the primary aims of Academic Development.

The reconceptualisation of education can only begin if students understand and, when necessary, can challenge traditionally accepted, often naturalised practices. Within the context of broad South African socio-political conditions and, more specifically, within one South African university environment, its Mission Statement and its Academic Development Programmes this thesis explores one way of beginning to bring about that change.

## Chapter Two

### The Theoretical Context

#### 2.1 Introduction

The political, social and educational changes discussed in the introduction to this thesis are characterised by their complexity and diversity. Contrary to the expectations of many, they have not precipitated an easily identifiable or uniform transition from one set of material conditions to another, more favourable set. Processes of providing equitable educational opportunities, for example, have been slowed, not only by complexity of delivery and increasingly stringent financial constraints but also by the fragmented transition to a democratic civil service which is hampered by residual, apartheid-created values which often obscure new possibilities. Complicating the situation still further, is the fact that the ideal of liberation may contain contradictions resulting from accepting and tolerating notions of diversity and fragmentation. A clear example of this, and a question at the centre of this research project, is the contradiction now apparent in the notion of emancipation (see also 2.5; 4.2.6 and 6.5.4). Within a modernist framework (see 2.1 and 2.endnote 1), the nature and hence the possibility of emancipation from various forms of social injustice were presented as inevitable. The range of possible definitions of emancipation was hardly in question as various forms of social theory and research, including action research, gave theoretical prominence to emancipatory processes defined according to Western modernity. Now, in a postmodern context marked by multiplicity and diversity and with the disintegration of a clearly defined struggle against the injustices of apartheid, unproblematised assertions about the nature of emancipation can themselves be blind to the complexities of material reality. In the end, it is necessary to absorb and accept the existence of contradiction and to formulate a position which can accommodate it.

The realities of post-apartheid South Africa undermine the unifying explanatory categories which, in an earlier phase of South Africa's history, may have provided the basis for adequate

socio-political and educational analysis. It demands a theoretical framework which can tolerate the fluidity and uncertainty which mark its diverse nature, one which foregrounds contradiction, fragmentation and complexity and one which displaces notions of closure, unity and commonality in favour of open-endedness, plurality and difference. The framework which provides such possibilities is postmodernism.

The term “postmodern” signifies an extremely broad and often contentious, confusing and paradoxical range of meanings. The multifaceted nature of postmodernity has inevitably resulted in the emergence of what Harvey calls “a minefield of conflicting notions” (1989: viii), articulated in a plurality of intersecting, frequently contesting, discourses. With these has developed an equally disparate array of responses. While some view postmodern thought as providing an exciting challenge which opens up possibilities for alternative ways of constructing the social and political world (Usher and Edwards 1994), others respond far more negatively. It has been dismissed as either “a hegemonic war of position within academia” (Skeggs 1991: 256), as “intellectual defeatism . . . helpless in the face of the world of difference” (Cope and Kalantzis 1993: 73) , as the deliberate undermining of modern emancipatory values (Habermas 1981) or, most frequently, as a capitulation to relativism and notions of pluralism which results in the abandonment of critical enquiry and social responsibility (Foster 1985). Smart provides a glimpse of the diverse application of the term “postmodern” when he remarks that

The postmodern problematic has been invoked to distinguish an historical period, an aesthetic style, and a change in the condition of knowledge: to conceptualise difference - a distinctive form beyond the modern - as well as similarity - a variant of the modern, or its limit form; and to describe affirmative or reactionary and critical or progressive discourses and movements. (1992: 164)

This comment encapsulates some of the challenges and contradictions represented by postmodern discourses; it hints at the source of many current and contentious debates and provides an indication of the difficulties facing teachers and researchers who wish to find a practical route through this complex terrain and to use insights emerging from it for their own educational purposes. It also highlights the need to “escape capture by the paradoxes of postmodernity” (During 1987: 32) and to avoid constructing postmodernist discourses in monolithic terms.

Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of postmodern thought is its capacity to tolerate ambiguity, contradiction and hybridity, all of which make closure both difficult and undesirable. In addition, Smart's statement underscores the importance of clarifying, as precisely as possible, the terminology used to frame the arguments.

The position adopted in this thesis is that the trivialisation and subsequent dismissal of key ideas from postmodern thought, most notably the notions of difference and diversity, the construction of subjectivity and the articulation of otherness, should be resisted. These debates demand serious critical engagement and have provided a platform from which educators have the opportunity "to think anew and renew their work for change" (Kenway 1995: 41). The central challenge is to extract useful and practical insights from them, to work "with and out of" (Yeatman 1994: 3) postmodern thought and, where necessary, to move beyond it.

In locating this study within the discourses of postmodernity, it is useful to distinguish between "postmodernity" on the one hand and "postmodernism" on the other. Postmodernity may be defined broadly as an emerging historical period which appears to be qualitatively different from modernity.<sup>3</sup> It is different partly because of the development of international information-based late capitalism, a negative trend which has propelled commodification into all spheres of life, and partly because of the positive emergence and validation of the "non-modern" other as exemplified in the foregrounding of previously marginalised groups and subgroups, which includes, for example, women, Africans and Orientals (Said 1985). Postmodernism is an intellectual movement happening *within* postmodernity<sup>4</sup> which subsumes a wide range of

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3 Deacon and Parker (1995), provide a useful characterisation of modernity arguing that it is "a dynamic cluster of conceptual, practical and institutional developments, associated with the Enlightenment tradition of secular, materialist, rationalist and individualist thought; the formal separation of the 'private' and the 'public'; the emergence of a world system of nation states; an expansionist industrialist capitalist economic order; and . . . the growth of large-scale administrative and bureaucratic systems of social organization and regulation such as schooling" (1995: 109-110).

4 Frequently, in the literature, the terms "poststructuralism" and "postmodernism" (referring to postmodern thought) are used interchangeably. It is true that they share central features, most notably the resistance to totalising narratives, the emphasis on the constitutive nature of language and discourse and the decentring of the subject. However, many writers (Best and Kellner 1991; Usher and Edwards 1994; Marshall 1992; Lather 1992) insist they are not identical. For Lather, postmodernism is a shift in material conditions, marked by revolutions in communication and information technology, the growth of multinational capitalism and the wide-spread emergence of the marginalised while poststructuralism

discourses across many disciplines. In this thesis, “postmodern thought”, which is a term appropriated from During (1987), is distinguished from postmodernism and is used to signify the positive impulses within it which provide theoretical space for the emergence and development of notions of, for example, difference or otherness, subjectivity and emancipatory social change.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for the rest of the thesis by exploring the possibility of developing a critical, emancipatory pedagogy that is informed by postmodern thought and which appropriates, develops and at times “rewrites” key ideas. Two concepts are of immediate relevance here and require explanation. Firstly, the term “pedagogy” (as opposed to “teaching”) is used in the same sense as it is by Lather (1991) and Simon (1992). Following Lusted (1986), they note that “pedagogy” foregrounds the political nature of education and the connectedness and interrelationship between teacher, learner and constructed knowledge. This implies that notions of the teacher as the neutral transmitter of innocent knowledge and of the learner as a passive recipient are fundamentally called into question. Considerations of what actually happens in classrooms, are, importantly, not excluded by the use of the term. As Simon (1992) points out, pedagogy is both about what students and teachers practise and about the politics implicated in that practice. Secondly, the notion of “rewriting” is drawn from Ebert’s succinct description of a postmodern strategy for “ ‘activating’ the ‘other’ suppressed and concealed by dominant modes of knowing: it articulates the unsaid, the suppressed” (1991: 888). This applies both to texts and signifying practices and also to the theories which inform them. For Ebert, “voicing this silent ‘other’ displaces the dominant logic - dislodging its hegemony and demystifying its ‘naturalness’ - and unleashes an alternative potential” (1991: 888).

This chapter is framed by a discussion of some aspects of postmodernity and of postmodern thought, beginning with an attempt to identify common features of what has been broadly described as “a confrontation with epistemology and deeply embedded notions of foundations, disciplines and scientificity” (Usher and Edwards 1994: 3), and ending with the central

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is the working out of cultural theory within that context. Usher and Edwards claim that poststructuralism pertains narrowly to anything textual and in terms of institutions and discursive practice. Marshall argues that that poststructuralist questions - about texts, language, subjectivity or interpretation, for example, should be asked within a postmodernist context, which embraces large historical and cultural questions.



challenges which now confront emancipatory critical pedagogy and a discussion of two pedagogical positions which take serious account of these challenges. Some key aspects of the work of Michel Foucault, most notably his analyses of power/knowledge regimes, the possibilities of resistance and, more briefly, the construction of subjectivity, have also been included here. The reason for this is that Foucault's thought, whether appropriated, adapted or rewritten, is beginning to have considerable impact on educational discourses. Also included are feminist responses to key debates within postmodern thought, this because they provide the most sustained attempt to develop what Pecheux calls "counter-discourse" (1975: 157) and are of direct relevance to the central concerns of this study. Most notably, they engage with issues around the tension between constructivism and foundational knowledge, between notions of difference and commonality, the construction of subjectivity, the foregrounding and emergence of the traditionally marginalised other and the need for the development of a politics of difference.

## **2.2 The Cultural Aspects of Postmodernity**

Any attempt to extrapolate shared features of postmodernity, a diverse and complex terrain, which has been aptly described as "an ensemble of conflicting discourses" (Ebert 1991: 887), must necessarily remain, in its own terms, partial and fragmentary. As Lather notes, "The postmodern moment is an open-ended construction that is contested, incessantly perspectival and multi-sited" (1992: 128).

While postmodern thought does not constitute a systematic theory or even a coherent set of perspectives, but instead is viewed as a "flexible system of language games" (Lyotard 1984: 17), it is nevertheless important to identify broad, underpinning notions that have informed it and, during the past twenty years, have had a profound impact on a wide range of discourses including philosophy, social theory, feminism and, more recently, education.

Postmodernity has been viewed from a wide variety of perspectives which embrace an array of practices, cultural descriptions and theories<sup>5</sup>. In Jameson's account, it is viewed as a new stage of "cultural development of the logic of late capitalism" (1984: 85); it is the cultural dominant of late capitalist society which entails significant cultural shifts including the breakdown of distinctions between high and low culture, rapid expansion of communications technology and the penetration of commodification into all realms of social and personal life and into all spheres of knowledge and information. Luke identifies "unprecedented global immigration and shifting national and regional boundaries" and "hybrid social and cultural identities" (1995: 83) as central features of postmodernity.

Yapa (1996) points out that postmodernism can be viewed both as an object (Harvey 1989; Lyotard 1984) and as an attitude (Waugh 1992). Those who emphasise the view that it is an object have an ontological focus which foregrounds the changes to material conditions over the past twenty-five years. This includes insights into such issues as a fragmented world which necessitates a politics of difference, the emergence of marginalised groups, pastiche in art and architecture and rapid information technology. For others it more closely resembles an attitude, "a theoretical and representational mood . . . a mood of skepticism with modern certainties" (Yapa 1996: 707). Here the focus is on epistemology and the questioning of earlier modernist theories of rationality, truth, humanism and representation.

For some theorists, however, such a distinction is false. Jameson (1984), for example, argues that postmodernism is both an object and an attitude reflecting the underlying social changes in the material world, the remapping of social space *and* the creation of alternative social formations. Aronowitz and Giroux also balance the two perspectives arguing that

postmodernism in its broadest sense refers to an intellectual position, a form of cultural criticism, as well to an emerging set of social, cultural and economic conditions that have come to characterize the age of global capitalism and industrialism. (1991: 62)

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5 It should be noted that some postmodernist thinkers, most notably Lyotard and Derrida, would reject a notion of theory that implies closure and an acceptance of an overarching structure. Lyotard claims that this is synonymous with social and political repression.

Some theorists, particularly those concerned with the development and articulation of an oppositional politics (Hennessy 1993; Kenway 1995), follow Ebert's distinction between "ludic postmodernism" and "resistance postmodernism" (1991: 887). She defines the ludic, as exemplified in the work of Baudrillard, as "theatre for the free-floating play . . . of images, disembodied signifiers and difference . . ." (1991: 887). Noting Baudrillard's emphasis on pastiche and the continuing slippage and disjuncture between signifier and signified, she argues that there is an attempt to "vacate the established relations between language and the world," which results in "dismantling the notion of politics itself as a transformative practice outside language" (1991: 887). Resistance postmodernism on the other hand, insists that social totalities continue to structure our lives and that critical analyses need to account for this. It draws its linguistic theory from Bakhtin (1981) and Vološinov (1973) where language acquires its meaning not from a formal system but from the social domain and the constitution of the sign in the context of social struggle. A stark distinction between ludic and resistance postmodernism, while useful for analytical purposes in the context of this thesis, should be viewed with some caution. Usher and Edwards (1994), for example, argue that the ludic and resistant forms of postmodernism are interdependent and that the ludic in fact underpins resistance and prevents the reversion to totalising forms of social analysis. It should also be noted that many critics of postmodernist thought conflate the resistance to totalising forms of analysis with the denial that totalities in fact structure our lives. While it is true that the power of totalising (for example, apartheid ideology) may have been underplayed in the interests of undercutting totalising forms of analysis, it should also be noted that the two concepts are not synonymous and careful distinction should be made between them.<sup>6</sup>

One of the common and central features of postmodernist thought is a profound suspicion of any overarching philosophical or political meta-theory. Lyotard's determination to "wage war on totality" (1984: 81) and his often cited formulation that "we no longer have recourse to the grand narrative - we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse" (1984: 60) gives expression to a crucial break with the dominant goals and assumptions of the discourses of the Enlightenment.

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6 Roseneau's (1992) distinction between "sceptical" and "affirmative" postmodernism is also relevant here.

In the context of modernist thought, critical reason is seen as the basis for the development of universal foundations of knowledge and the source of progress and truth. The goal of the discourses of modernity was to develop universal morality and law and objective scientific enquiry. As Laclau aptly articulates it

If something characterises the discourses of modernity, it is their pretension to intellectually dominate the foundation of the social, to give a rational context to the notion of the totality of history, and to base in the latter the project of a global human emancipation. As such they have been discourses about essences and fully present identities based . . . upon the myth of a transparent society. (1988: 71)

In addition, it is believed that the development of rational forms of social organisation will bring about freedom from the irrationalities of myth, religion and superstition as well as the dark side of human nature. Enlightenment thought celebrates equality, liberty, human creativity, the pursuit of individual excellence and scientific discovery and it does so in totalising, foundational and unifying terms (Harvey 1989).

It is precisely these unifying theories, with their “foundational claims that wrap themselves up in an appeal to science, objectivity, neutrality and disinterestedness”, (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991: 68) that are rejected by postmodernism as reductionist, enlightenment myths. Totalising theories are viewed, not as a means towards emancipation, but as synonymous with terror (Lyotard 1984); far from leading towards truth or enlightenment, they are viewed as a reductionist form of continued domination, oppression and suffering in which plurality and difference are suppressed in favour of conformity and homogeneity (Best and Kellner 1991).

Postmodernity, then, is characterised not by the unities underpinning modernity but by fragmentation, plurality, contestation and contradiction. Notions of difference and heterogeneity are privileged to the extent that postmodernism has been described as “a different position which in fact makes difference its point of view” (Lovlie 1992: 120). This is also clearly evidenced in Foucault’s insistence that discontinuity, multiplicity and difference are foregrounded as opposed to continuity, uniformity and homogeneity (1980b).

Along with the rejection of totalities and the privileging of the notions of difference and fragmentation, is the fundamental displacement of the unified, rational, humanist self. As will be shown later (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2), the image of the rational individual in a closed system has given way to the view that subjects are socially and linguistically decentred; they are fragmented and dispersed, existing in an open and dynamic system and in a constant state of redefinition and flux (Henriques et al 1984; Kenway 1995; Weedon 1997).

### 2.3 Michel Foucault: An Exemplar of Postmodernist Thought

When Burbules and Rice describe postmodernism as a being marked by “the perceived saturation of all social and political discourses with power or dominance” (1991: 395), they articulate one of the central themes in the thought of Michel Foucault. A social philosopher and historian, who is frequently described as one of the most influential postmodern thinkers,<sup>7</sup> his work has had a profound impact on a range of discourses, most notably in the social sciences, humanities and education.

Foucault, who had a lifelong preoccupation with the relationship between knowledge and power, described his project as “a critique of our historical era” (1984: 42). Drawing on an anti-Enlightenment tradition,<sup>8</sup> Foucault rejects the equation of reason, emancipation and progress that govern modern power/knowledge discourses. He speaks against the “tyranny of globalising discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical *avante-garde*”, supporting instead “the claims to attention of local discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges” (1980b: 83). For him, all reality cannot possibly be harnessed into one philosophical system. In

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7 Foucault is sometimes referred to as a poststructuralist (Young 1981), along with Derrida and Lacan, because he emphasises the constitution of the subject in discourse. For others, however, (Usher and Edwards 1994; Haber 1994), he is more properly located within postmodernity, this because of his broader concerns with matters pertaining to knowledge and power. Still others warn against attempting to position him within a single rubric, noting his complexity and his use of a multiplicity of sources (Best and Kellner 1991; Gutting 1994).

8 Foucault distinguishes between the Classical era (1669-1800) and the Age of the Enlightenment (1800 - 1950).

*The Order of Things*, for example, he remarks that “Discourse . . . is so complex a reality that we not only can, but should, approach it at different levels with different methods” (1970a: xiv).

Foucault focuses on the emergence of modern institutions, their forms of governance and the domination of the individual through them. He argues that modern forms of rationality are reductive and oppressive and insists that while knowledge, rationality, social institutions and subjectivity all appear given and natural, they are in fact social constructions fundamentally intended to regulate and dominate human behaviour. As Best and Kellner note, “Where modern theories tend to see knowledge and truth to be neutral, objective, universal, or vehicles of progress and emancipation, Foucault analyzes them as integral components of power and domination” (1991: 38).

In his earlier work, for example in *The Order of Things* (1970a) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault uses the term “archaeology” to distinguish his historical approach from other approaches, most notably hermeneutics, which seeks to uncover deep underlying and unifying truths. For him, archaeology aims to fundamentally displace totalising interpretations; it has a diversifying effect rather than a unifying effect, creating space for the discovery of the rules for the formation of multiple discourses and their conditions of possibility. It attempts to uncover discursive rules which are not immutable or universal but are contingent on specific historical contexts.<sup>9</sup> He employs a strategy of investigation which he terms a principle of reversal (1972), which is a means whereby fundamental assumptions of modernism are interrogated, for example that emergence of modern institutions was an inevitable and natural development towards progress and betterment. Foucault’s strategy was to take a particular interpretation of a historical development and to consider the implications of a reverse analysis.

Later, in his attempt to analyse material institutions and forms of power more fully, for example in *The History of Sexuality* (1980a), Foucault widens the scope of his inquiry and shifts to a genealogical analysis. Here, through the historical analysis of moments at which social practices

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9 It should be noted that while Foucault foregrounds discontinuity against continuity, he does not, as Derrida and Lyotard do, collapse all forms of structure and intelligibility into unending signification. He attempts to acknowledge those continuities that do exist and employs a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity.

change (discontinuities), he shows how familiar objects of experience and institutions are in fact objects produced in historically variable relations of power (Haber 1994). In his desire to disrupt familiar “natural” objects of experience and to re-examine evidence and assumptions, Foucault sets out to completely re-evaluate and overturn habitual ways of thinking, to deny the existence of fixed meaning or essence, to allow rupture and discontinuity to emerge where traditional historical analysis sought continuous, progressive development. In addition, the purpose of the genealogical method is to bring about a “reactivation of local knowledges” (1980b: 85). These are forms of knowledge or experience that have been viewed as inadequate or secondary and unworthy of the attention of scientific enquiry. The knowledges he includes here are those of traditionally marginalised groups, the psychiatric patient, the housewife and the imprisoned criminal.

While the genealogical method is broader in intent than the archaeological method, they both attempt to re-analyse the social field from a micrological standpoint which favours discontinuity and dispersion over continuity and unity; they both decentre the human subject and pluralise the field of discourse in the interests of representing historical events in their full complexity. This emphasis on diversity and the fragmentation of the subject clearly exemplifies central themes in postmodernist thought.

Foucault’s rejection of traditional theory is located in his critique of both the liberal theory of power (which is based on notions of individual sovereignty), and the Marxist theory of power, where power is located in the economy and the state. In both of these models, power is possessed by individuals or groups, it is directed downwards from a centralised source and is repressive (as opposed to productive) in its exercise.

Foucault conceptualises power outside of notions of class, state and law, thus opening up conceptual space to think of power as existing in domains other than those studied by conventional political theory. He defines it as “a multiple and mobile field of force relations where far-reaching but never completely stable effects of domination are produced” (1980a: 102). He insists that power is exercised rather than possessed; it is never something seized, acquired or shared. It is centreless, flows from a multiplicity of sources and constitutes

individuals' bodies and identities. With this constitutive capacity, power is viewed primarily as "a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (1980b: 119). So, instead of foregrounding repressive power, Foucault privileges its generative nature, illustrating how certain institutional and cultural practices have constituted individuals. The "disciplinary power" of modern institutions, which includes schools and universities, can be seen to operate in ways that has subjects participating in their own subjection. Disciplinary power appears to increase the power of individuals while subtly rendering them more passive and docile. As he points out

The individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual with his<sup>10</sup> identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces. (1980b: 73-74)

Power is therefore seen as relational, anchored in a multiplicity of micro-practices which comprise everyday life and is used as a means of normalisation and social control. It is everywhere and the social field is a complex network of unstable and heterogeneous relations of power.

Power, for Foucault, is also significantly, a "bottom up" process. In his analysis, instead of looking for downward, coercive movement he argues that

One must rather conduct an *ascending* analysis of power starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been - and continue to be - invested, colonised, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (1980b: 99)

For Sawicki (1991), though not for many other feminists (eg Fraser 1989; Hennessy 1993; Yeatman 1994), this analysis shows how an illustration of power relations at the micro level of society can lead to an understanding of broader, more general effects of domination, for example,

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10 The use of the generic "he" by various writers occurs several times in this thesis. It is not a practice that I adopt nor do I consider it to be acceptable in others. However, I have opted not to indicate each occurrence with the conventional *sic* but instead to state my position here.



class or patriarchy. She argues that although Foucault makes these “global” claims, he avoids using universals as explanatory concepts in order to avoid what she calls “theoretical overreach” (1991: 23). In his analysis, he offers historical descriptions rather than causal or functional explanations thus providing the necessary but not the sufficient conditions for domination. There is considerable ambivalence regarding Foucault’s use of totalising terminology, but the overriding tendency is towards specificity and what Hennessy terms “emphatic localism” (1993: 21).

One of the most significant aspects of Foucault’s analysis of power is that, for him, both the public *and* private domains are the effects of power. In his refusal to distinguish between these domains, he renders *all* social practices potentially political. For Sawicki, this expansion of the political “to include a heterogeneous ensemble of power relations operating at the micro-level of society” (1991: 23), implies that any resistance must be implemented as local struggles against multiple forms of power.

Within this articulation of the mechanisms of power, a theory of knowledge based on truth which is outside of power relations and in some way an undistorted, power-free representation of reality gives way to a fundamentally different conceptualisation. For Foucault, “Truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power . . . truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power” (1980b: 131).

Integrally linked to Foucault’s analysis of power, and one of the most controversial aspects of his work, especially amongst feminists and educators, is his treatment of the processes of resistance and, crucially, the resultant transformation or emancipation. While the overriding emphasis in his work may be on subjects who are, as he puts it “judged, condemned, classified, determined” (1980b: 94), there are also much more optimistic strands in his thought. He denies, for example, that “there is a primary and fundamental principle of power which dominates society down to the smallest detail” (1982: 224), and asserts that

so many things can be changed, fragile as they are bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self evident, more a matter of

complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints. (in Kritzman 1988: 156)

He is clear on the relationship between power and resistance: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1980a: 95). The key point here is that resistance can never be simplistically opposed to power; power itself produces multiple points of resistance against itself, thereby generating opposition from within. In other words, resistance is inscribed in the relations of power it opposes. This does not mean however, that subjects are fatalistically trapped by power; rather, “we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (in Kritzman 1988: 123). In Foucault’s view, the charge of fatalism and determinism

would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance [which] are present everywhere in the power network . . . there is a plurality of resistances, by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (1980a: 95-96)

Whether or not there is indeed theoretical (or pragmatic) space for a notion of resistance in Foucault’s work is highly contested. While Sawicki (1991) has interpreted his analysis of power as permeating a social field which is an open system containing possibilities of domination *and* resistance, he has also been interpreted as describing a totalitarian form of power from which there can be no escape. Hartsock, for example, reads him as constructing “a world in which things move, rather than people, a world in which subjects become obliterated, or, rather, recreated as passive objects, a world in which passivity or refusal represent the only possible choices” (1990: 167). Haber (1994), on the other hand, concedes that he appears committed to creating the means by which marginalised groups can assert themselves but argues that he universalises domination by postulating the omnipresence of power and therefore precluding the possibility of emancipation. Gutting’s caution against attempts to formulate general, unifying interpretations of Foucault (as opposed to specific readings of texts) is worth noting here. For him, Foucault “is at root ad hoc, fragmentary and incomplete” (1994: 2) and therefore any attempts to identify unifying themes or schema will result in distortion of his thought.

Foucault's politicising of everyday life and the implications of multiple power struggles at local and specific levels, keeps opposition an ongoing possibility. While he refuses to privilege one form of resistance over another and avoids identifying with a specific community, his focus is clearly on those who are marginalised in a liberal society.

His lack of a specific and concrete political plan of action, however, has been the source of much criticism. Because he does not address a recognisable community he has been challenged as being inadequate to the task of providing direction towards political and social reconstruction and change (Fraser 1989; Hartsock 1990). This charge, however, is only of importance within particular modernist expectations. Foucault does not set out either to legitimate specific counter-discourses or to speak on behalf of others but rather to be involved in a process which aims to reveal and undermine power at its most invisible. This he views as an activity which is conducted *alongside* those who struggle for power, it does not entail either speaking on their behalf or providing solutions from a social and theoretical distance. He views his analysis of power as a challenge to existing social conditions a tool for use by those involved in power struggles, rather than a prescriptive process which provides strategies for resistance and political action.

Foucault rejects concepts of liberation and emancipation which rest on a notion of an essential self. As subjects, there is no transcendental position from which empowerment can take place; instead of unity, there is dispersal and fragmentation; instead of fixed definition there is ongoing constitution and redefinition. Subjects can locate themselves in oppositional discourse but in the absence of monolithic discourse, subjects are multiply determined and multiply positioned in a range of discourses, some contradictory. This implies that subjects are shaped and reshaped rather than determined in a conventional deterministic sense. It is crucial to note that power/knowledge formations are constantly shifting and reconstituting and that any ability to challenge, disrupt or transform will also be a continual, fluid process rather than a transcendental state of emancipation (1980b).

The use of Foucault's concept of the capillary nature of power in the context of a critical language programme could be viewed as another of the contradictions mentioned in 2.1. One of the central tenets of CLA is to facilitate a greater sensitivity about the use of potentially

oppressive linguistic practice. Learners (and teachers) are encouraged to monitor and modify their language use and to try to avoid language which is offensive in any way. Insofar as this process is the imposition of a surveillance system on learners, it can be seen as representing a form of discipline which might seem at odds with Foucault's general position. The work of Mellor and Patterson (1994), which critiques poststructuralist adaptations of critical literacy, captures what they consider to be a contradiction. They point out that "on the one hand, the poststructuralist classroom expects socio-cultural critique while, on the other, it asserts (and maintains) the teacher's duty not to impose this critique" (1994: 43). For them, then, teachers who adopt critical perspectives, far from withdrawing from the teaching process and leaving the learners "free" to come to their own preferred readings, impose a "specific reading 'regime'" (1994: 53) albeit one which encourages anti-racist, anti-sexist readings. They consider the poststructuralist position to be one which is trapped in circular arguments which are the result of "the fear of acknowledging the normativity of the reading classroom - and the difficulty of admitting that specific readings are required or 'preferred'" (1994: 48).

It is only if postmodernism is reduced to relativism that this position need be an unacceptable contradiction. In this thesis it is argued that any teaching intervention requires a normative position but that certain trends within postmodern thought do not preclude this possibility (see 2.1). Indeed, it is argued that the acknowledgement of difference and diversity and the tolerance of unresolvable tensions does not deny the possibility of an ethical stance; instead, it enhances a position which encourages the development of a more just and equitable society and one which openly acknowledges this perspective. Knowledge is always contaminated by power but to adopt an ethical position does not need to be seen as "a deceitful and repressive extension of institutional surveillance and regulation" (Mellor and Patterson 1994: 49). It is precisely by calling our attention to the unavoidable links between power and knowledge that we can act justly.

## **2.4 Postmodernism and Educational Discourses**

Insights from such postmodernist analyses have had a marked impact on educational discourses generally and on pedagogical initiatives in particular. Despite the continued links with and

influence of the language and assumptions of the Enlightenment, people working in educational institutions at all levels are beginning to experience the unsettling effects of postmodernist thought on long held assumptions and beliefs. Across a range of educational discourses including policy formulation, curriculum development and teacher education, the postmodernist suspicion and undercutting of foundationalist views, the decentring of the subject and the consequent foregrounding of difference and diversity, has meant at least the weakening of reliance on traditional modernist categories.

Muller, a South African educationist, writing of the development of appropriate curricula in a context constantly challenged by emerging particularities, acknowledges the significance of the postmodern challenge. For him

new particularisms have all emerged in the course of struggles against a dominant order which has spoken in the name of one or other universalism . . . the currently fashionable terms of post-modernity or late modernity . . . signal the world-wide checking of the movement towards an uncomplicated universalism, and the point at which the particularisms of language, of culture, of local cultures and knowledges reassert themselves against a dominant culture whose claims to represent universal truth, beauty and justice are being challenged by a flowering of alternatives. (1988: 39-40)

Foucault's provocative social criticism in particular, has highlighted the negative aspects of rationality, knowledge and subjectivity. He has offered different ways of understanding the discursive constitution of the subject and has illustrated how totalising liberal-humanist discourses are integrally linked with processes of domination. His analysis of power/knowledge regimes has sensitised many educators to the pervasive nature and operations of power so that educational discourses can no longer be viewed as innocent, objective or outside relations of power and knowledge. It also opens up additional domains of human agency by allowing for the possibility of micro-struggles outside monolithic power structures. In addition, the notion of knowledge as disinterested has been replaced by one where it is intrinsically caught up in an ongoing process of construction in particular and dynamic, discontinuous and constantly changing social conditions.

The expansion of the realm of the political is integrally related to the foregrounding of difference and, once again, Foucault's insights are seminal. His refusal to separate the private and public domains (see 2.3) and the consequent extension of the political, has meant the opening up of political space to previously marginalised groups. Haber encapsulates the significance of this shift when she notes that Foucauldian politics

poses a plurality of questions to politics rather than simply reinscribing the act of questioning in the framework of a pre-existing political doctrine. Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge thus makes it possible for the silenced majority to begin to speak, to begin to formulate points of resistance. (1994: 87)

Within this widened political framework, postmodernism also offers new insights into traditional cultural boundaries. The rejection of Eurocentric values has resulted in the collapse of "high" and "low" cultural divisions, a strong emergence of competing and previously marginalised voices and a shift of power from the privileged and elite to marginalised groups intent on defining and redefining their own social relationships and gaining some control of their lives. The notion of a central, Western, patriarchal tradition which serves as a point of authoritative reference has been displaced by the idea of differing and traditions which are legitimate and valuable in their articulation of the partial and the specific.

In the South African educational context, the impact of the collapse of former political boundaries and the consequent demand for and development of multicultural education, is keenly felt. This does not imply that educators are suddenly appropriating postmodernist categories in order to interpret and understand their specific contexts. It does, however, mean that, working in postmodern conditions, they are located in its discourses and are consequently confronted by a multiplicity of educational demands which necessitate the rethinking of previously held assumptions. Hennessy makes an extremely illuminating link between postmodernist thought and multicultural education when she notes that

The movement for multicultural education emerges out of the same historical moment that produced postmodern theory. Both are the effect of a crisis of the subject; both are efforts to rearticulate the self as a subject-in-difference. (1993: 10)

Since 1990, with the unbanning of the ANC and most especially since South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, socio-political changes have been particularly rapid, with educational institutions constantly required to define and redefine themselves outside of the familiar apartheid-driven structures; they are constantly challenged across a wide variety of discourses to position themselves within less certain and shifting constellations. For teachers working in South African classrooms, Muller's "flowering of alternatives" (1988: 40) presents an array of pedagogical challenges as diverse and complex as the social conditions from which they emerge. Diversity and difference, once synonymous with deficit, separation and alienation have now become positive and central points of reference within educational debate. With the emphasis now firmly on multiplicity, a wide range of previously marginalised "cultures" is competing for social and educational space, and while some discourses inevitably remain dominant, various attempts to integrate *and* to validate contesting "voices", are the frequent theme of conferences and policy and planning initiatives. Two recent South African Applied Linguistics Association conferences, for example, had as their themes: *Constitutionally enshrined multilingualism: challenges and responses* (1995) and *Language(s) and the new democracy: participation rights and responsibilities* (1998). Entire textbooks are now being devoted to the creative management of multilingual classrooms (see, for example, Heugh et al 1995) and in 1996, for the first time, a study was undertaken which attempted to draw together insights from academic development initiatives at four South African universities (Bulman 1996). In a range of different educational contexts, then, educators are exploring ways in which to improve provision to meet the requirements of the changing student population (see, for example, Angelil-Carter 1995; Chundra 1997; Clarence 1994; Frame 1996; Janks 1995; Reynolds 1997; Seneque 1996; Thesen 1994, 1997).

## **2.5 Critical Pedagogy Contested**

The challenge of postmodernist insights has also impacted directly on current classroom practice, most notably on the progressive emancipatory aims of critical pedagogy, which has been practised in Britain since the 1960 and has existed in America as a "border pedagogy" (Giroux 1988) since the same time. Critical pedagogy is strongly informed by the Habermasian notion

of emancipatory knowledge (Habermas 1972) which is centrally concerned with social reconstruction and the notion of critique. It is defined by Grundy as

a process of discernment . . . between the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural.’ This is important because one of the fundamental ways in which ideological oppression operates is to make that which is cultural (and hence in principle susceptible to change) appear natural (and hence unchangeable). (1987: 104)

For Apple, the value of emancipatory knowledge is that it can result in “the ability to ‘see’ the actual functionings of institutions” as well as focusing on “the possibilities of spontaneity, choice and more equal models of control” (1979: 163).

Critical pedagogy is noted for its concern with issues of social justice and democracy, its focus on specific historical contexts, its belief in the transformation of knowledge and the world through critical practice and its commitment to open-endedness, reciprocity and dialogue. Teachers are engaged in constructing a learning environment conducive to the empowerment of the learner and, with this, the emergence of a strong student “voice” which will help to equalise the asymmetrical power relationship between teacher and learner (Giroux 1988; Giroux and Maclaren 1986; Liston and Zeichner 1987; Shor and Freire 1987). Kemmis adds an important dimension to this process in his observation that the critical view of education “has doubts about speaking on behalf of others . . . its intention is *not* to speak *on their behalf*, rather it intends to create conditions under which they can speak for themselves” (1995: 156).

Despite its claims about distinctive qualities and unique offerings, critical pedagogy in fact shares, with other educational discourses, a core of underpinning, modernist assumptions based on the belief in individuals as socially responsible, self-motivated, unitary beings who have the capacity for critical thought and for remaking and transforming the world in terms of Enlightenment concepts of reason, freedom and rational autonomy (Deacon and Parker 1995). Because critical pedagogy has not signalled a radical break from modernity, claims about enlightened, progressive pedagogy can only be viewed as “second order differences” (Deacon and Parker 1995: 110) and critical pedagogy has certainly not escaped postmodernist interrogation and scrutiny.



Postmodernist feminist pedagogy has provided one of the most penetrating and sustained critiques of this critical pedagogy. Three specific, closely related concerns will be considered here. The first is the charge that despite the apparent insistence that critical enquiry should be guided by the norms of open-endedness, dialogue, reciprocity and historical specificity, critical pedagogy has nevertheless generated a set of social assumptions which it seems all too willing to impose on its learners. Weiler, for example, notes that feminists

want to retain the vision of social justice and transformation that underlies liberatory pedagogies but they find that their claims to universal truths and their assumptions of a collective experience of oppression do not adequately address the realities of their own confusing and often tension-filled classrooms. (1991: 450)

Ellsworth (1989) concurs with this view. Drawing, amongst others, on the work of Shor and Freire (1987) and Liston and Zeichner (1987), she notes that the expressed goal of critical pedagogy is towards a critical democracy and social justice which, through the acknowledgement and affirmation of race, class and gender identities, will empower students and bring about deeper understanding and, with it, the capacity for social action and change. She argues that while the classroom practices of critical educators may engage with specific, historical conditions faced by students, “educational researchers who invoke concepts of critical pedagogy consistently strip discussions of classroom practices of historical context and political position” (1989: 300).

What remains, she argues, are highly abstract, ahistorical definitions, (included here are the key notions of “critical reflection”, “student voice”, “dialogue” and “empowerment”), which are more appropriate for debate around such concepts as “justice” and “universal values” than they are for the practical considerations of establishing classroom practice.

This leads directly to the second major criticism of critical pedagogy and one which is of crucial importance in third world contexts. It is encapsulated in Ellsworth’s central question: “What diversity do we silence in the name of ‘liberatory’ pedagogy?” (1989: 299). The charge here is that critical research and pedagogy fail to account adequately for diversity and difference or for what many writers term “otherness.” The underlying problem for Ellsworth, and one which, she

claims, leaves critical pedagogy fundamentally flawed, is what she terms “the violence of rationalism against its Others” (1989: 304). She argues that “Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposition an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others” (1989: 301).

For Ellsworth, as long as the goal of critical pedagogy is the rationalist teaching of analytic and critical skills for evaluating the truth or value of propositions, as long as the rules of reason are enforced in the classroom, the critical pedagogue is trapped in a single position and can make only one “political gesture”:

S/he can ensure that students are given the chance to arrive logically at the “universally valid proposition” underlying the discourse of critical pedagogy - namely that all people have a right to freedom guaranteed by the democratic social contract. (1989: 304)

For the teacher engaged in emancipatory pedagogy this means that, in the context of the classroom, all moral positions should be accorded equal time for discussion. Ellsworth regards this process, which is based on traditional notions of dialogue, as problematic. She argues that the rules of dialogue are premised on false assumptions that all members have equal opportunity to speak, that all respect the others’ right to speak and that they all feel safe to do so. In this, her position is similar to that of Burbules and Rice who point out that

It is not enough merely to create the conditions of a forum in which all parties have the right to speak. In a society structured by power, not all differences reside at the same level . . . the promulgation of many voices and the representation of the concerns of different groups extend beyond mere tolerance or the creation of an “open forum” that may be less open than it appears, when judged from the perspective of marginalized persons or groups. (1991: 396-397)

They also focus on crucial questions that are often left unasked. For example, information is needed about those who may feel unable to speak for fear of retribution and are therefore intimidated into apparent silence. In addition, taken-for-granted, tacit rules of communication can in themselves render particular modes of speech unacceptable and therefore need to be interrogated.

Of crucial importance to Ellsworth is that dominant rationalist thought can no longer be considered as the self-evident way of constructing classroom practice and that “the myths of the ideal rational person and the ‘universality’ of propositions have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, middle class, Christian, able-bodied, thin and heterosexual” (1989: 304). Instead of rationalist assumptions, Ellsworth believes that post-structuralist thought, which is based on epistemological diversity and multiplicity rather than primarily on reason, has the potential to provide the means for the inclusion of historically marginalised, “Other” groups. This, she claims, can be achieved through the construction of partial, specifically located narratives which explicitly recognise the relationship between knowledge and interest and are understood as one position from which to view particular social conditions. Narratives of experiences of all kinds need to be recognised and, crucially, responded to. All voices should be viewed as partial in the sense that they are unfinished and because they represent particular interests:

Because those voices are partial and partisan, they must be made problematic, but not because they have broken the rules of thought of the ideal rational person by grounding their knowledge in immediate emotional, social, and psychic experiences of oppression, or are somehow lacking or too narrowly circumscribed. Rather they must be critiqued because they hold implications for other social movements and their struggles for self-definition. (Ellsworth 1989: 305-306)

One practical way of accommodating the various voices in any given group is to establish what Ellsworth calls “affinity groups” (1989: 317). These are smaller groups within the large class which are constituted in response to particular, shared experience and which are premised on the notion of difference rather than the more common striving towards unity and consensus. The task in the classroom can now be seen

not as one of building democratic dialogue between free and equal individuals, but of building a coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy within the culture and the classroom. (1989: 317)

Weiler also challenges the dominance of rationalist thought as the only acceptable source of truth and argues that other models of thought should be acknowledged as a potentially powerful source

of meaning. She acknowledges experience and feeling as a possible foundation for changed theoretical and political understanding and contends that they can be considered as “a guide to a deeper truth than that of abstract rationality” (1991: 463) which can be conceived of “as links between a kind of inner truth or inner self and the outer world - including ideology, culture, and other discourses of power” (1991: 463).

Personal experience can be the beginning of resisting dominant notions of truth especially when experience runs counter to what is presented and generally accepted as “true”. Simon acknowledges this view but warns that “experience is not an unproblematic notion of cultural knowledge formation since it moves always in relation to the discursive regimes employed in the production of subjectivity” (1992: 61). In other words, experience of experience is also socially constructed. Weiler concedes this but nevertheless maintains that self-examination, self-critique, collective exploration and the exchange of experience can provide, in Foucault’s terms “a perspective from which to interrogate dominant regimes of truth” (1991: 465).

Debate about the nature and role of rationalism and its relationship to other epistemologies is extremely vexed. For the purposes of this discussion it is defined as an epistemological perspective which privileges the cognitive capacity to abstract, to systematise and to formulate generalisations which are independent of context. With these dominant characterising features, it is often set against narrative accounts and personal experience. There is no doubt that when rationality is foregrounded to the exclusion of all other forms of knowledge, it can be seen, in Ellsworth’s terms, as “violence . . . against its Others” (1989: 304). When it is viewed as the only “truth”, which demands the ability to use totally decontextualised language to abstract from concrete situations in order to make statements which are then claimed to be dispassionate, objective and universally true, then the concept warrants the degree of disdain and dismissal of feminists like Ellsworth.

Fiske, however, provides an interesting alternative perspective on this debate. In a discussion of the emergence of subordinate knowledges, he distinguishes broadly between rational knowledge or scientific rationalism and popular knowledges. Rational knowledge he defines as a singular, monolithic and “uniaccentual” epistemological body which operates as a “power-bloc” (1993:

182) by suppressing rather than accommodating subordinate, popular knowledges. In its insistence on representing the only form of truth, scientific rationalism “works constantly to preserve the boundary between the reality it controls and knows as true, and the realities of those ‘weaker’ knowledges against which it defines its own superiority” (1993: 181).

While rational knowledge has sufficient dominance to largely ignore the existence of popular knowledges, these subordinate forms of truth are forced to take serious account of scientific rationalism. As Fiske points out

They are multiaccetual for they cannot escape the knowledge which attempts to repress and invalidate them: they can exist only in relationship to it and can never exist in autonomous independence of it . . . While official knowledge may be able to dismiss all others as untrue, popular knowledges cannot dismiss official knowledge because its power to impose the truth, however incompletely, is part and parcel of the social experience of the people. (1993: 182)

In the end, the dismissal of rational thought is not a tenable position. It can, ironically, be seen to actually deprive historically and socially marginalised groups of access to domains of powerful discourses and consequently from social and political power. It seems clear that while its dominance should be interrogated and other forms of knowledge validated, it is also necessary to acknowledge the impact of rationality on social reality and to harness its valuable aspects in the interests of greater social, educational and economic mobility. Weedon would support this position. For her “It is not ultimately helpful merely to reverse the rational-irrational opposition. It needs to be thoroughly revised and re-constituted in ways which no longer marginalize women’s interests” (1997: 28).

In the context of the university, there is no question that students need, for example, to be able to debate and evaluate issues and to construct logical arguments and all of these skills fall firmly within the domain of rational thought. Indeed Ellsworth herself, in calling for the *critique* of critical pedagogy is drawing strongly on a rationalist framework while at the same time interrogating its fundamental assumptions.

It is precisely around the tension between access to dominant rationalist discourses and their interrogation that what has been termed “the genre debate” has developed (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). Janks, in discussing the need to provide students with access to the dominant forms of discourse captures the argument in her assertion that “. . . we need to do this in such a way that enables them to harness these genres to their own purposes while simultaneously enabling them to counter and transform them” (1995: 95).

In the end, teachers should be striving towards the balancing of various knowledges, towards a multiplicity of intelligences (Gardner 1993) where the capacity for rationality, with its requirements of abstraction, generalisation and decontextualised analysis, is no longer the immutable and monolithic strategy required for success, but one important dimension in the successful representation of various dimensions of reality.

Complementing the conceptualisation of “otherness” and of crucial importance to understanding the significance of post-modernist thought to the remapping of educational discourses, is the critique of the notion of subjectivity. Central here is the deconstruction and displacement of the humanist view of the individual as an essential, unified, conscious and fixed entity which is the source of ideas and is largely responsible for the construction of the social world. Drawing on a Foucauldian analysis, Weedon formulates the counter position, arguing that “against this irreducible humanist essence of subjectivity, poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (1997: 32). Subjects, then, are viewed as being constituted rather than constitutive. They are dynamic and multiple, particular products of specific historical and social practices which are constantly in the process of being negotiated and always positioned in relation to particular discourses and produced as these. Subjectivity should be approached “through the meanings and incorporated values which attach to a person’s practices and provide the powers through which he or she can position him - or herself in relation to others” (Hollway 1984: 227).

The implications of this perspective are vital to the conceptualisation of pedagogical initiatives. It cannot be assumed that any two people and, even less, a group of people (for example black,

first year, female students in the South African context) have the same subject identities and that their experiences should be approached in the same way. As Weiler points out, this view of subjectivity calls into question “assumptions of the common interests of the oppressed” (1991: 469) and implies a fundamental reconsideration of such terms as oppression and liberation, most especially when these are formulated outside concrete historical and social contexts.

This view of subjectivity also necessitates a re-examination of the work of Paulo Freire who is frequently celebrated as the educational theorist most compatible with the goals of critical and feminist pedagogy. Freire constructs his pedagogical theory broadly around the abstract oppressed/oppressor dualism and focuses on the question of class to the exclusion of factors such as gender and race. This results in a failure to address different forms of oppression, the possibility of struggles within groups, and the potential for subjectivity to be constructed in contradictory ways around both oppression and domination. These failings are often overlooked by adherents of Freire. Indeed, Kenway and Modra, in alerting feminist educators to them, have observed that “it looks very much as if Freirean idolatry is taking the place of the development of critical consciousness *in the very project of liberatory education itself*” (1992: 157).

Within Freire’s pedagogy, then, there is not sufficient account taken of the possibility of different truths from different positions. By using broad abstract terms, he “slides over the contradictions and tensions within social settings in which overlapping forms of oppression exist” (Weiler 1991: 453). This problem is compounded by his insistence that when “the oppressed” interpret their world, they are likely to become a unitary source of political action as they commit themselves to social transformation. The assumption that “when the oppressed perceive themselves in relation to the world, they will act together collectively to transform the world and to move toward their own humanization” (Weiler 1991: 453) is highly problematic and again undercuts the possibility of a contradictory experience of oppression. It is in the light of this critique that Weiler is able to insist that the positionality of each person should be considered because

in settings in which students come from differing positions of privilege or oppression, the sharing of experience raises conflicts rather than building solidarity. In these circumstances, the collective exploration of experience leads not to a

common knowledge and solidarity based on sameness, but to the tensions of an articulation of difference. (1991: 469)

The third postmodernist feminist criticism of critical pedagogy, and one which is an extension of the second, is that the question of the power and authority of the teacher is left unaddressed.<sup>11</sup> Within Freirean pedagogy, for example, there is an automatic assumption that the teacher “is on the same side” as the oppressed, and that s/he plays a pivotal role in the instigation of dialogue which will lead to a better understanding of material conditions and collective social action. Although Freire acknowledges the power of the teacher within the context of a hierarchical institution, he does not address other forms of power held by the teacher in terms of race, gender or class. The possibility of contradictory experiences of teacher and “oppressed” and the potential (and likely) collusion of teachers in oppressive structures is avoided in the name of “empowerment” which encourages teachers to discard the notion of education as an inculcation of students by the more powerful teacher and to view themselves as learners of students’ experience and knowledge. As Boomer puts it, emancipatory teachers make

a palpable effort to divest themselves of overt or blatant authority, and . . . adopt instead the role of *guide*, *counsellor* and *friend*. Teaching, if it means didactic activity in front of the whole class is seen as suspect, by comparison with . . . facilitation of small group work.(1989: 3)

There is however, an inherent contradiction in this situation because, as Boomer continues, “the regime is nonetheless *manipulative*. The teacher directs work indirectly. While students are less aware of being *told* what to do than in ‘normal’ classrooms, they are nonetheless being moulded” (1989: 3).

It is the recognition of this that is the basis of Ellsworth’s claim that strategies of student empowerment and dialogue merely appear to promote equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian teacher/student relationship unchanged. She argues, firstly, that despite claims to the contrary, the teacher is automatically viewed as someone who “knows better” and who needs to relearn, not so much for deeper understanding of student experience but rather to bring them

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11. The same argument applies to the relationship between the researcher and researched.



“up” to the level of the teacher. Secondly, she questions the ability of teachers, faced by their own internalised oppressions, to articulate and bring to light the oppressive experiences of others. Teachers are fundamentally implicated in the very structures they attempt to change and, as such, cannot play the role of disinterested mediator. Instead of attempting to abandon an authoritative role, teachers should instead, as far as is possible, make this authority explicit and attempt to reveal the rules and criteria by which they operate.

In their contestation of critical pedagogy, Ellsworth and Weiler certainly provide educators with an insightful “re-writing” of some of its fundamental tenets. This results in an alternative pedagogical model which takes seriously notions of diversity, partiality and multiplicity. In the end, however, this remains within the critical mould; the contestation results in a shift of perspective rather than any fundamental changes. This is because, despite a new emphasis on difference and multiple subjectivity, like other critical accounts, their reformulations retain a strong tendency to privilege the “knowing subject” at the expense of one constituted in discourse.<sup>12</sup>

## **2.6 The Development of a Critical Postmodernism**

It is important to note that postmodernism does not, and in its own terms, cannot, attempt to provide other secure frames of reference in place of foundational views. It does not mark the favouring of new absolutes but rather, a growing tendency to recognise the multiplicity of the relations of power and an increasing awareness of the complexity and fragility of historical conditions and events. As a researcher and teacher attempting to work within this conceptual framework, it is necessary, therefore, to guard against the temptation to fall back on more familiar, “safe” categories and the desire to define (and therefore fix) a containing framework which can serve as a constant and simplifying point of reference. It is also crucial, particularly for those involved in educational endeavours committed to the establishment of social justice,

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12. By contrast, Weedon’s position is a much more rigorous articulation of the notion of the multiple subject constituted in discourse. She provides a clear argument in which her claims about the fragmented subject and her arguments about how it is constituted, are coherent and sustained.

not to make uncritical assumptions about the experiences of marginalised, oppressed groups, to automatically assume shared ideological positions or worse, to impose a perspective on others in the name of equality and justice. This vigilance can, however, lead to a personal and intellectual paralysis that finds expression in inertia and bewilderment. For many people, it has resulted in what Lather calls “transdisciplinary disarray regarding standards and canons” (1991: 7), which can be seen to undercut claims of truth and justice that underpin emancipatory efforts (Hartsock 1990: Lather 1992). For some, the postmodernist use of provisional constructions rather than systematic categories has been interpreted as actively undermining marginalised groups and has been resisted as “a slide into relativism that is dangerous for the dispossessed in its undercutting of the grounds for social justice struggles and its feeding of nihilism and quietude” (Lather 1989: 14).

For Peller (1987), far from being nihilistic, the postmodernist message is one of hope, this because it implies that there is no necessity for the justification of the retention of asymmetrical power relations. Likewise, Giroux notes that the rejection of master narratives “is synonymous with an attack on those forms of theoretical terrorism that deny contingency, values, struggle and human agency” (1991: 69). Usher and Edwards also adopt a positive perspective:

To subvert foundations is not to court irrationality and paralysis, but to foreground dialogue, practical engagement and a certain kind of self-referentiality. In the postmodern the claim is not that there are no norms but that they are not to be found in foundations. They have to be struggled over and in this struggle everyone must assume a personal responsibility. (1994: 27)

Cherryholmes approaches the debate from a different perspective, arguing that relativism is only problematic when there is a structure or set of standards to be relative to. As he points out

A Derridean might argue . . . that the issue is one of *differánce*, where meanings are dispersed and deferred. If dispersion and deferral are the order of the day, what is relative under structuralism is difference under deconstruction. If there is a foundation, there is something to be relative to; but if there is no foundation, there is no structure against which other positions can be “objectively” judged. (1988: 185)

There is no doubt that educational discourses are now compelled to interrogate and discard old forms of universalism in the interests of multiplicity and particularity. It is also true that while the essentialism/constructivism debate has resulted in a more careful and dynamic analysis of cultural, social and political particularities, it has also brought with it sharp polarities and perpetuated a fear of reverting to essentialism, thus preventing a more rigorous analysis of specificity and difference (Fuss 1989). Cherryholmes' somewhat simplistic dismissal of foundational structures gives rise to serious analytical difficulties for those engaged with the articulation of oppositional pedagogies, or, in feminist terms, a politics of difference. During the past few years educators and feminists (Apple 1993; Ebert 1991; Fraser 1989; Fuss 1989; Giroux 1991; Haber 1994; Hennessy 1993; Kenway 1995; Luke 1995; Sawicki 1991; Skeggs 1991; Walby 1992; Yeatman 1994) have all attempted to address the foundationalist/difference tension and, in varying ways, to combine important insights from postmodern thought with an analysis of social totalities. The central question here is the extent to which it is possible to participate in struggles over meaning in ways which do not repress difference and plurality while at the same time acknowledging the necessity of some degree of unity. Both Simon (1992) and Giroux (1991), for example, while accepting the dismantling of foundational structures, temper their positions by retaining some of the modernist articulation of unity. Giroux insists that if any relationship between postmodernist discourse and oppositional politics is to be retained, then the notion of totality should be preserved "as a heuristic device rather than as an ontological category" (1991: 70). Hennessy (1993), too, arguing within the discourse of materialist feminism, insists on a critique of social totalities, particularly patriarchy and capitalism, but a critique that does not abandon or avoid attention to the differential position of subjects within these discourses. She insists that totalities do continue to shape lives and that they should be acknowledged as such.

Walby concurs with this view arguing that social totalities, far from declining in importance, continue to construct "virulent social divisions" (1992: 33). Having both acknowledged the profound differences both within and between groups and noting the dangers of generalising from the experiences of any one group, she calls for a more rigorous analysis of the social context of power relations, insisting that "there are some widely repeated features and

considerable historical continuity” (1992: 36) that need to be accounted for. In this, her position is similar to Skeggs who argues that

If subjectivities are multiple and changeable; if power is diffuse; if legitimation is only local then the ability to challenge is constrained to the particular. Feminists would argue for struggle at the particular: but also at the general, across a range of sites, and at a number of levels. (1991: 261)

Apple, working in an American context in which conservative educational policies are increasingly dominant, acknowledges that the growth of multiple positions associated with postmodernism has had a profound impact on the understanding of the relation between culture and power. For him, however,

we have tended to move too quickly away from traditions that continue to be filled with vitality and provide essential insights into the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy that dominate schools at all levels. Thus, for example, the mere fact that class cannot be used to explain all can be used as an excuse to deny its power. (1993: 307)

He argues for the retention of analytical constructs like “class”, noting the power of structural dynamics and advising caution in the “rush towards poststructuralism” (1993: 308). Like Hennessy and Walby, however, Apple does not attempt a return to universalising theories. As he explains

It is not to ask us to revivify previous grand narratives whose ‘will to know’ was itself more than a little problematic . . . It is to remind us that this is still capitalism and that makes a difference to our daily lives . . . Ignoring the complex relations between cultural capital and economic capital will not make the situation any easier. The world may be text, but some groups seem to be able to write their lines on our lives more easily than others. (1993: 315)

Kenway (1995), drawing on Yeatman (1994), Hennessy (1993) and others argues that although postmodernism has problematised notions of unity, authority, accountability and emancipation, this does not necessarily imply their total abandonment. Crucially, however, it does require their

reinvention or “rewriting”, an interrogation of these concepts and their rearticulation within an oppositional, political framework.

It is important to acknowledge here that “totality” can have three different meanings. Firstly, it can be viewed as an historically existing set of conditions which results from past social formations. Secondly, it can be used as an ontological and universal category and thirdly, it can be seen as a strategic, analytical device. Postmodernism rejects ontological totalities, recognises the existence of social totalities and is aware of the possibility of using totalities as political strategies. Within postmodernist thought then, there is certainly no room for the retention of totality as an ontological category but totality understood as a strategic device is quite compatible with postmodern thought. The educationists and feminist writers mentioned here seem to be understanding postmodernism to be discarding the notion in all respects, and are arguing for it to be retained as a strategic device and not as an ontological category. Postmodernism is not, however, opposed to this position.

In the South African context, the recognition of social totalities is of particular importance. For millions of people in this country, apartheid as a social totality had and continues to have a profound impact on lives. While it cannot be argued that it is an ontological totality, it remains a strong social reality, a “totality” that needs to be accounted for in any educational analysis. As educators, we need to balance the differing experiences of our learners against their shared history because it is only once we identify a degree of common response within the context of diverse experience, that we can hope for effective educational intervention (see 6.4.2 - 6.4.5 and 6.4.9 for an analysis of data that accounts for both the commonality and the contradictions).

Haber (1994) provides the most nuanced account of how postmodernism can be accommodated to critical theory. In her response to postmodern thought, particularly that of Foucault and Lyotard, she provides a detailed description of the development of an oppositional politics which supports and elaborates on the debates above and begins to indicate what an oppositional “rewriting” might entail and how a critical postmodernism can be developed. Beginning with an acknowledgement of her commitment to the law of difference, she argues that any political theory must allow for the expression of difference if it is to be viable. For her, oppositional

politics implies that the emancipation of marginalised groups is possible. However, if *all* notions of unity (or structure) are equated with repression then the possibility of identity formation which is necessary for political resistance and intervention is denied, or at the very least, severely curtailed. When a commitment to diversity and difference is equated with its *universalisation*, then the possibility of the subject, whether individual or communal is foreclosed. Identity is always provisional but this provisionality need not deny the legitimacy of the self. She summarises a complex set of dynamics thus:

When the law of difference is read as the destructuring of all structures and as demanding the delegitimizing of any and all claims to legitimation, the poststructuralist view of language as a differential system of signs overlaps with the political space of postmodernism. Both become a threat to oppositional politics because both insist always and everywhere on delegitimizing and destructuring. When read as universal principle, the law of difference forecloses on the possibility of revitalising the discourse of otherness, and so forecloses on the possibility of voicing marginalised concerns. (1994: 117)

Haber accepts, with other poststructuralist thinkers (see also Hennessy 1993; Yeatman 1994; Ebert 1991) that all structure is temporary and as such, it is always open to the possibility of change and redefinition. Within this framework she nevertheless insists that any oppositional politics must posit the notion of structure, this in order to generate the subjects and communities necessary for a viable political theory.<sup>13</sup> She accepts that there are no unified or autonomous subjects and that communities are themselves plural, inconsistent and open to constant deconstruction but argues that because aspects of poststructuralism and postmodernism universalise difference, the formation of identity and community is precluded. This means that the ideas can be appropriated but not fully adapted for a viable oppositional politics. In her articulation of what she terms a “radical pluralism” (1994: 133) she concedes that the expression of difference is important but at the same time insists that the acknowledgement of similarity and solidarity, even if temporary and partial, is of equal importance.

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13 Haber argues, for example, that although Foucault includes the notion of resistance in his analyses, he nevertheless avoids key questions around it and therefore provides an inadequate basis from which to formulate an oppositional politics. Hennessy (1993) concurs with this view, arguing that Foucault’s analysis is limited by his insistence on localities, discontinuity and fragmentation.

She acknowledges that the law of difference implies that any structure, with its possibilities of unity, closure, coherence and totality will inevitably suppress difference. The question at issue is not whether there is suppression but whether this suppression is, in Lyotard's terms, terroristic. Haber argues that suppression is not always synonymous with terror and that it is in the nature of language to create structures with the inevitable suppression of difference implicit in this. The challenge is to construct an oppositional politics which incorporates this insight, accepts that all structures and all community relations are plural and subject to redefinition and in doing so "insists on describing phenomena from a multiplicity of perspectives, eschewing all hierarchies" (1994: 115).

For Haber, then, rewriting the notion of structure entails discarding all possibilities of discerning essences or identifying structures which are timeless or unchanging. Structure is, of necessity, open to redescription, deconstruction and reinterpretation. She points out that in some strands of poststructuralist thought, totalization and totalitarianism are often viewed as synonymous and any attempt to determine difference, to generate structure is constructed as oppressive.

The poststructuralist concept of language understood as a differential system of signs is . . . suffused with political implications: it calls for resistance to oppression which it associates with any determination or structuring of difference. Poststructuralism then, gets politicised with its concern of the deconstruction of otherness *into difference*. All pretension to "normal" discourse, for example, can be deconstructed to show that "normalcy" suppresses difference: that it is also what it is not is suppressed in determining what it is. Structure both creates and excludes otherness. (1994: 116)

For the poststructuralist, all second order discourses come about through the oppression and silencing of other discourses. To choose one set of discursive practices of necessity forces a choice between two narratives which cannot be legitimated and which can always be redescribed to reveal " a terroristic suppression of alternative narrative constructions" (1994: 116).

Haber agrees that there can be no legitimation in any absolute sense but she insists that this does not mean that there is no pragmatic use of legitimation. Because no structure can ever range over all possibilities, there will always be exclusion but exclusion that exists, if poststructuralism is

taken seriously, not necessarily as the imposition of terror but simply as the way in which language operates. For Haber, “unity can accommodate structure as long as unity recognises its subservience to difference” (1994: 117).

Oppositional politics first and foremost must be allowed to address concerns of the Other. With Apple (1993) and Walby (1992) Haber insists that “there are systematic structures, systematic political structures, actually in place which both create and marginalise Otherness. Oppositional politics cannot allow the law of difference to mask this fact” (1994: 118).

Once again, the notion of the subject as constituted and dispersed rather than essential and unitary is crucial. Drawing on the poststructuralist analysis of language as a system of difference and the constitution of the subject within this framework, Haber notes that the poststructuralist subject can never be defined within the domain of one single discourse or narrative. There are an infinite number of possible discursive constructions and therefore an infinite number of potential resistance points. Haber accepts that the linguistic subject is a cultural construct which, for her has crucial implications:

This is equivalent to claiming that subjects are always the effect and perpetuator of some community or other. This, in conjunction with the potentially open nature of language, is the key to creativity and empowerment - the key in other words, to oppositional politics. (1994: 119)

To deny the possibility of coherent resistance and coherent subjects is to secure social, cultural and economic orders; it is to leave, for example, the controlling impact of racism and patriarchy unchallenged rather than rewritten.

The fact that there is no single authentic and stable self and that the self can be many subjects does not entail an unrepresentable, schizophrenic self. Unity, as rewritten by Haber, is simply the requirement that a thing or a subject be minimally coherent enough to be identified and redescribed. This does not necessitate what she terms “unicity”, the demand that subjects speak with one voice within a closed and unitary system.



If radical pluralism is the mark of self this does not mean that there can be no communities; community, like the self is always open to deconstruction and the subject is the effect of many communities, some of which are in direct conflict. Subjects are constituted in the vocabularies of a range of communities and so it is only as a member of a community that they can be empowered. The process of empowerment begins from the experience of a community already in place even if this community itself can be further deconstructed:

Indeed, it is the potential redescription and even deconstruction of any community, along with the heterogeneous subject-communities which make up the self, that gives us the basis upon which an oppositional politics can be built - a politics where difference rather than hierarchy, heteronomy rather than homogeneity, and protean rather than disciplinary and normalising discourse, is the goal. (1994: 123)<sup>14</sup>

The recognition of points of similarity and solidarity, as well as the foregrounding of difference is one of the keys to oppositional politics; the fact that such similarities are partial and temporary does not undermine their significance. All political exchange necessitates closure in so far as it involves subjects arguing for position; closure here though, is an artificial and relative construct, it is temporary, subject to change and partial.

A politics of difference then, differs from other political models through its recognition and acceptance of the metaphysics of difference, while still claiming unity, but unity, crucially, in conjunction with the acknowledgement that “all unities necessarily have a remainder” (Haber 1994: 129). It is in this “remainder” that the potential for change lies.

The radical pluralism entailed by this politics of difference operates with an expanded sense of the political. It thereby politicizes social relations that liberal theory often marginalizes. Furthermore, it addresses diversity in order to reveal forms of domination frequently overlooked within traditional emancipatory theory. And lastly, it operates with a relational and dynamic model of identity, recognizing plurality both within and between subjects. (1994: 133)

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14 With regard to the possibility of community, Haber acknowledges the broader debate, most notably the work of Young (1986), who argues that an acceptance of difference is incompatible with the idea of community. For her, an assertion that subjects can understand each other, even partially, is a denial of the contradictions and the diversity implicit in the foregrounding of difference. It is therefore tantamount to promoting the belief in the social and political unities which are undermined in postmodernist thought.

## **2.7 Towards a Postmodernist Pedagogy**

There is no question that postmodernist thinking has had a profound impact on the conceptualisation of curricula and educational initiatives generally. There is, however, also the charge that while it offers many challenges and undercuts previously held assumptions, it does not offer practical alternatives (Burbules and Rice 1991). While there may be some truth to this claim in specific postmodernist formulations, it is also necessary to recognise that, in its own terms, postmodernism cannot prescribe blueprints for every teaching situation; it must necessarily be evocative, partial and uncertain rather than didactic and prescriptive. This does not, however, imply that its challenges should be ignored or that it cannot provide guidelines for educational programmes and useful suggestions for pedagogical practice. Indeed, as has already been shown, many educationists take extremely serious account of the extent to which postmodernism has unsettled educational discourse. Included here are Cherryholmes (1988), Giroux (1991) Simon (1992) and the New London Group (1996). Simon's development of what he calls "a pedagogy of possibility" (1992: 4) and the more recent emergence of a "pedagogy of Multiliteracies" (New London Group 1996) are two pedagogical formulations which are more compatible with the theoretical position adopted and developed in this thesis.

### **2.7.1 A Pedagogy of Possibility**

In response to the claim that critical pedagogy has developed yet another foundational theory, Simon (1992) concedes that it has resulted in the desire to universalise the discourse, to fix its parameters and to locate it within the field of educational studies for the purposes of comparison and contrast. He is, however, sharply critical of attempts to identify a group of "founding fathers" for critical pedagogy as though a single orthodox account could be located "in a patriarchal vanishing point" (1992:xvi). He also disputes the prevailing view that it should be "encrusted in the work of Paulo Freire" (1992: xvi). He warns that these efforts put critical pedagogy in danger of what he terms "terminal ossification" (1992: xvi) and insists that there should be "no more attempts at totalising revolutions" (1992: 5). For him

critical pedagogy is a useful term only to the extent it helps bring together people who share enough in the way of political commitments and educational perspectives to be able to learn together, refine our vision, and support our diverse efforts as educators. The utility of the term “critical pedagogy” is its reference to an ongoing project and certainly not a prescriptive set of practices. (1992: xvi)

While Simon rejects totalising narratives, he retains some aspects of the promise of possibility inherent in modernity. In his writing, a pedagogy of possibility implies a developing vision for a more just, future social order based on securing fundamental human dignity. In addition, and of central importance, is the ability to relate pedagogical practice to that vision. Drawing on Giroux (1988), he argues that

without articulating a vision of how one’s practices might relate to a vision for the future and without seriously taking up the question of how a pedagogy is constituted as a form of moral practice, any talk of teaching as a responsible and intellectual practice becomes an empty and abstract form. (1992: 14)

The formulation of a future social order can never be neutral or innocent but implicates teachers’ actions as inherently moral and political. Two related questions are crucial to the development of this position. The first concerns the precise nature of social orders and the second, more vexed question, revolves around the relationship between other, differing and possibly contradictory articulations of those conditions.

For Simon, neither the pragmatically constructed teacher as promoter and perpetuator of institutional values, nor the vague ahistorically situated pedagogue and pursuer of abstract over-defined “truth”, is an adequate starting point for the formulation of a sustainable moral position.

The first and crucial prerequisite for a pedagogy of possibility is that it is located in a specific historical context and that the knowledge claimed by it is recognised as partial, constructed and therefore limited. To allow for relativity increases, rather than diminishes, responsibility. It entails “working from an ethical imagination constituted within the fullness of a relation to another as an other. In this relation another is not reducible to our ability to know her or him” (1992: 17). It also necessitates a response on the part of teachers “to confront practices that diminish the dignity of the particularity of the other” (1992: 17).

Within this context, it is crucial to examine the potentially exploitative nature of dominant forms of discourse and the extent to which they constrict the development of human capacities. In this regard, questions of value which involve decisions about the appropriate direction of future development become central. Broadly, Simon argues that

educational practice should participate in a social transformation that is aimed at securing fundamental dignity and radically reducing the limits on expression and achievement imposed by physical and symbolic violence. (1992: 17)

In order to make this statement more concrete, Simon argues that education needs to be viewed as one of several institutions (others include family, religion and law) which interact in the construction of subjects. Teachers need to consider the contribution of education to this process and, given the undoubted shaping impact of school discourse on students, should probe deeply into the nature of the premises on which their pedagogical decisions are made.

Simon is highly sceptical about the underlying premise of self-realisation on which much current pedagogy is based. This is because “choice is assumed to be an open structure of possibility through which one makes what one wants of oneself, assuming the necessary knowledge and skills for independent action have been acquired” (1992: 18). Choice defined as self-realisation fails to recognise “the structured character of private choice” (1992: 19). In other words, it takes little or no account of the extent to which choices themselves are structured, regulated social forms which both limit and enable practices. It is essential, therefore, that

pedagogical practice must find ways of addressing not only the enhancement of an individual’s potential for the acquisition of skills and knowledge but as well the development of resources within which people can begin to challenge and transform those relations which structure the available opportunities from which to choose. (1992: 19)

Structured social forms, then, delimit and define the expression of human capacity. By extension, the notion of possibility must be confined to options available in a clearly defined historical situation as particular social practices intermeshing with a specific set of human capacities. The relationship between social practices and human capacities

is intended to be understood as an indissoluble relation, a particular dynamic constellation of enablement and constraint that, in any given configuration, defines the terms of what will count as possibility in a situation. (1992: 21)

In the light of the potential contradiction between human capacities and regulating social forms, it is important to note that any relation between them is never fixed. They are indeterminate, partial and open to critique, interrogation and possible change. For Simon

any given constellation of forms and capacities can be interrogated as to the particular economic and cultural interests it supports and social relations it challenges or reproduces, dimensions that will have a determinate impact on the range of expression of capacities that can be expanded within set limits. (1992: 22)

Pedagogy as moral practice would endeavour to interrogate existing social practices and encourage the establishment of conditions that would expand human capacities and understanding rather than truncate or deny them.

The protection of human dignity and the lessening of violence do not, however, automatically follow from a commitment to the extension of human capacities. A pedagogy of possibility, in its interrogation of existing social forms and their potential transformation, must be compatible with other principles, the most important of which is an inclusiveness which validates and secures human diversity.

In his focus on diversity, Simon's position closely approximates both Ellsworth's (1989) and Weiler's (1991), and provides a strong counter to their claims that critical pedagogy fails to address the notion of otherness. He offers no final solutions about how to deal adequately with diversity in a classroom context but he does pose central questions and provide insightful, cautionary comment. He argues that the recognition of diversity is a fundamental condition of human dignity and identifies a vast and complex array of practices which could comprise it. In terms of its substance, he includes modes of communication, dress, and forms of relationship between men and women amongst his examples. He also notes different forms of diversity, the possible list of social relations in which various substantive practices could be implemented. In addition he insists that

In taking diversity seriously, one has to come to terms with the implications of such a list posing questions as to the desirability of constraints on any of its categories or on the forms of expression within any given category. (1992: 24)

The imposition of constraints on categories of otherness is a complex and vexed question but nevertheless one which needs to be addressed. It could be argued that when human dignity is diminished, then otherness can justifiably be constrained. This in itself, however, is problematic and leads to complex debates about the nature of human dignity and which groups make the decisions about how it should be defined or delimited. In the South African context, for example, many practices are being justified through claims to “cultural traditions” with the treatment of women as the inferior property of male partners providing just one example. It seems that the most fruitful way of dealing with this issue is, first, to acknowledge culture as being dynamic and fluid rather than static and then to consider each situation in its particularity and decide from that point whether constraint is appropriate or not. It seems justifiable, for example, to constrain otherness when its particular manifestations are blatantly diminishing or discriminatory.

This leads to the second of Simon’s concerns regarding diversity. If cultural diversity is to be validated and foregrounded, then there is always the danger of using pluralism in destructive and divisive ways. Simon’s question is most particularly apt in the South African context:

in a society of regulating social forms, where difference equals disadvantage, how will pluralism avoid becoming just another name for apartheid? What set of social conditions will be able to secure difference without manufacturing disadvantage in the process? (1992: 25)

The answers to these questions are far from clear. In keeping with postmodernist principles, there can be no easy formula or prescription. What is clear, however, is that to attempt to listen to other voices is never simply a matter of increasing tolerance - it is the recognition of the inevitable presence of unity within discourse and an attempt to establish that unity. It is, however, a unity that is premised in the final analysis on the inability to ever fully know the experience of the other and to know that meanings are never likely to be the same. In the context of a newly integrated university this realisation is of crucial importance.

In terms of pedagogical practice and, again, in keeping with the postmodernist perspective, Simon points out that

there are no abstract, decontextualised answers to the questions of which practices constitute a pedagogy of possibility, no prescriptive curriculum within which to encapsulate its terms. Rather, those seeking to work within this pedagogical form must approach such a task strategically, locally and contextually . . . (1992: 58)

He suggests that one starting place could be a critique of existing curricula which may include an analysis of hegemonic language forms, for example in terms of race or gender. Importantly too, he views a pedagogy of possibility as a vehicle for the construction of what he calls “a counterdiscursive activity” (1992: 60). This is particularly relevant to the purpose of this research because it means

addressing the “naturalness” of dominant ways of seeing, saying and doing by provoking a consideration of why things are the way they are, how they got to be that way, in what ways might change be desirable, and what it would take for things to be otherwise. (1992: 60)

While the practical implementation of a pedagogy of possibility needs to be particularly situated, it is at the same time crucial that it does not become another orthodoxy. It needs to be constantly open to critique and to make visible its own production both at the level of content and pedagogical practice.

### **2.7.2 A Pedagogy of Access**

A second pedagogical perspective, which should be read in conjunction with Simon’s pedagogy of possibility and of extreme importance in the context of this thesis, is the emergence of what can be broadly termed a “pedagogy of access” (Cope and Kalantzis 1993; The New London Group 1996). The New London Group for example, have recently formulated what they refer to as a “pedagogy of Multiliteracies” or the “transformed pedagogy of access” (1996:60,72).

Members of this group locate their argument within the context of the rapidly changing nature of public, community and economic life, where

A strong sense of citizenship seems to be giving way to local fragmentation; and communities are breaking into ever more diverse and subculturally defined groupings. The changing technological and organisational shape of working life provides some with access to lifestyles of unprecedented affluence, whilst excluding others in ways that are increasingly related to the outcomes of education and training. (1996: 61)

Having noted the impact of postFordism<sup>15</sup> and its implications for teachers of literacy, they build their discourse around the idea of “multiliteracies,” a term coined firstly to acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings emerging within current communication technology where textual meanings constantly intersect with and are themselves shaped and reshaped by visual, spatial, audial and behavioural representations and secondly to provide “a focus on the realities of increasing local diversity and global connectedness” (1996: 64). Their collective concern is to foreground the crucial importance of difference and to address the question: “How do we ensure that differences of culture, language and gender are not barriers to educational success” (1996: 61)?

They insist that, despite the superficial attractions of postFordism, it is essential for teachers not to define success in exclusively economic terms and to include in their vision a critique of social hierarchies and economic and educational inequities. They argue that issues of access and critical engagement should be held in constant tension:

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15. The New London Group define postFordism as a social condition which “replaces the old hierarchical command structures epitomised in Henry Ford’s development of mass production techniques . . . Instead, with the development of capitalism, more and more work organisations are opting for flattened hierarchy. Commitment, responsibility and motivation are won by developing a workplace culture where members of an organisation identify with its vision, mission and corporate values. The old vertical chains of command are replaced by the horizontal relationships of teamwork. A division of labour into its minutest, deskilled components is replaced by ‘multiskilled’ well-rounded workers who are flexible enough to be able to do complex and integrated work. Indeed, in the most advanced of postFordist, fast capitalist workplaces, traditional structures of command and control are being replaced by relationships of pedagogy: mentoring, training and the learning organisation” (1996: 66). The kinds of discourses required of workers within this less formal structure are of crucial concern to the teachers of literacy.



We need to tread a careful path in which students have the opportunity to develop skills for access to new forms of work through learning the new language of work. But at the same time, as teachers, our role . . . is not to produce docile, compliant workers. Students need to develop the capacity to speak up, to negotiate and to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives. (1996:67)

In the context of the university, this is also a crucially important tension. As this research attempts to show, as students develop academic literacy, they should be given both access to powerful academic discourses while at the same time developing a critical awareness of the institution in terms of the power relations that shape it and students' subjectivities within it. It is also important to note at this point that in this thesis, an ideological, critical model as opposed to an autonomous model of literacy is adopted. (Clark and Ivanič 1997; Luke 1993; Morgan 1997; The New London Group 1996; Street 1995). This implies that rather than viewing literacy in technical terms and as largely independent of social context, reading and writing practices are viewed as integrally linked to both power structures and cultural practices in specific historical contexts. From this viewpoint, literacy practices can play a role in either reproducing or challenging dominant power structures. Morgan provides a particularly succinct view of critical literacy, which is worth quoting at length. She points out that

Critical theories of literacy derive from critical social theory and its interest in matters of class, gender and ethnicity. Both share the view that society is in a constant state of conflict, for the possession of knowledge (hence power), status and material resources is always open to contest. Struggles to define the world and claim its goods are carried out by unequally matched contestants, for certain social groups have historically controlled the ideologies, institutions and practices of their society, thereby maintaining their dominant position. But since these are socially and historically constructed, they can be reconstructed. One of the chief means of reconstruction is language. (1997: 1)

The emergence of cultural and linguistic divergence in public life has an immediate impact on the environment of the classroom. Diversity is viewed as a crucial resource, not simply for the benefit of marginalised groups, but for all learners. They claim that when different languages, discourses and styles are experienced alongside each other, there are both metacognitive and metalinguistic gains for everyone and an increased capacity for critical reflection. At the same time, they warn against the dangers of obscuring power relations by using diversity in a tokenist

way which in the end results in a sidestepping of important issues and a reification of the concept of difference that ensures the continued dominance of mainstream groups.

Cope and Kalantzis (1993), themselves members of the New London Group, make a similar point, warning that leaving “difference as difference” (1993: 64) underestimates crucial social power differentials and can result in further disadvantaging already disadvantaged groups. They mount a forceful argument, insisting that difference, far from being socially and politically innocent, is in fact often an integral part of social inequity. In their development of what they call “an explicit pedagogy for inclusion and access”, they argue that the different subjectivities of students should not be ignored and that “an acceptance of enduring difference” (1993: 64) is a pre-requisite for the development of any pedagogy. Differential experiences should always be a pedagogical starting point, one which does not force homogeneity or privilege the cultural principles of the dominant group. At the same time, teachers should strive towards commonality in the provision of access to education and the social world. For them, the tension lies in the constant need “to shunt between increasingly important parochial differences and a supracommunity that is genuinely inclusive in what it privileges, its symbols and access to social goods” (1993: 64).

Commitment to a pedagogy of access necessarily entails equal attention to the *explicit* teaching of various institutional discourses and the related genres.<sup>16</sup> A concrete example of why this is necessary is found in the context of the university. Many academics teaching and researching in universities have come (often unconsciously) to accept the conventions of the institution as naturalised (Thompson 1984; 1990; see also 3.3.3.3), part of the taken-for-granted practices of the discourse community. As fully fledged members of that community, they possess an intimate, and often implicit, knowledge of the rules and codes of the institution and its disciplines. (Ballard and Clanchy 1988; Gee 1996). This knowledge becomes increasingly invisible as it becomes naturalised; it is so deeply embedded in unseen institutional codes and expectations that it

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16. Kress (1985) distinguishes between discourses and genres, pointing out that while discourses express the meanings and values of large social institutions, genres are “conventionalised forms . . . of texts [which] have specific forms and meanings deriving from and encoding the functions, purposes and meanings of the social occasions. Genres therefore provide a precise index and catalogue of the relevant social occasions of a community” (1985: 19).

becomes common-sense knowledge, and, as such, it is seldom made explicit to new members of the academic community. Academics frequently use what Starfield refers to as “osmosis pedagogy” (1994: 17), which assumes that students will easily absorb and begin to understand the discourses and genres of the institution and to use its language and conventions appropriately. Access to the systematic ways of speaking and writing which delineate the rules and prohibitions of the institution (Kress 1985; see also 3.3.4), needs to be achieved via *explicit* teaching of its genres and discourses which will reveal both the conventions of the institution and, crucially, the fact that they are socially constructed (Angelil-Carter 1995; Cope and Kalantzis 1993; Delpit 1988; Martin 1993).

This argument applies to all students entering the university but even more crucially to historically excluded and marginalised students. When students have been denied access to the discourses of educational and social power (as many black South Africans have) and when there is an incongruence between their primary, home-based discourses and their secondary discourses which are developed outside the home (Gee 1996; see also Reynolds and de Klerk 1998 and 3.3.4.1), then transitions into a new discourse become extremely difficult and explicit access to academic discourse, as a means of acquiring “social goods” becomes imperative. As Morrow points out, there is difference between gaining “formal” access to an institution and gaining “epistemological” (1993: 217) access to its discourses. Whether it is the teaching of linguistic and structural features of specific genres (information booklets; official documents; academic essays or seminars, for example), or whether it is discussion about typical interactional styles in tutorials, it is this “epistemological” access which is at issue here.

It should be noted that access to and understanding of university discourses do not necessarily imply automatic acceptance of socially constructed conventions. On the contrary, as Angelil-Carter points out:

The extent to which . . . students are able to control academic discourse will partially determine the extent to which they can challenge it, and force it to open up to previously marginalized discourses, allowing different discourses in. (1995: 7)

This study is specifically concerned with the extent to which Critical Language Awareness (CLA) can contribute towards both the access to and the interrogation of university discourses. (see 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 6.4 )

This section has attempted to highlight a few of the central concerns of critical pedagogy and to revisit some of them in the light of postmodernist thinking. By foregrounding partiality and otherness, it rejects any attempt to impose a foundational theory of knowledge and with that, the humanist notion of the subject. In different ways, both Simon (1992), with his ethical framework, and the New London Group (1996) who provide a more pragmatic postmodernist perspective, show that pedagogy can and should focus on difference and diversity, that a range of subjectivities in the classroom is an important educational resource and that a focus on specific and local contexts is a key consideration. For Simon, despite an acknowledgement of partiality, pedagogy should nevertheless have a broad ethical underpinning which at times necessitates a justifiable constraint on human diversity. More specific pedagogical implications of working in this framework will emerge in later chapters.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Linguistic Perspectives: From Structuralism to Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter Two traced the movement from modernist epistemological certainty and its corresponding individual unity to the postmodern insistence on fragmentation and partiality. This, as has been shown, brought with it fundamental shifts of perception about the construction of knowledge, the nature of the human subject and the centrality of specific socio-political contexts. These shifts entailed the intermeshing and interdependence of ideas from a range of different domains, most notably from philosophy, social science, political studies and linguistics. While it is difficult to extrapolate discrete “discipline-based” strands of thought from a broader, more integrated perspective, it is nevertheless necessary, particularly in the context of this thesis, to focus on linguistic debates and to consider both the contribution of linguistic theory to changing perspectives and the extent to which these changes themselves resulted in new directions in the development of linguistic theory.

This chapter will focus on central insights from linguistic and social theories which foreground the social and constitutive nature of language and which attempt to explain the relationship between language, power and ideology. It also attempts to show how an understanding of these insights can provide teachers and students with mechanisms for improving their understanding of social power relationships and of human subjectivity. Before this is possible, however, it is necessary briefly to discuss some central developments in linguistic theory, in order to indicate which linguistic discourses have traditionally dominated Applied Linguistics, to identify those concepts or features which have immediate relevance to this thesis and to acknowledge the full significance of recent theoretical developments. The linguistic concepts discussed are those which have informed the development of this study and thus provide, along with the issues raised

in Chapter Two, the theoretical background for the analysis of the data. This chapter is not, therefore, intended as an exhaustive survey of the dominant ways in which language has been understood within English Studies, Linguistics or Applied Linguistics.

## 3.2 The Traditional View of Language and its Critique

### 3.2.1 The Correspondence Theory of Language

Theories of language imply models of social conditions, ways in which to define human beings in relation to their socio-historical contexts; they entail different strategies for the interpretation of social reality and “inevitably deploy conceptions of human subjectivity, meaning and the nature of its authority” (Morgan 1986: 1). Some theories, however, are much more explicit than others about the relationship between language, social existence and power. Weedon, for example, argues that

For poststructuralist theory the common factor in the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, power and individual consciousness, is *language*. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. (1997: 21)

One variation of the correspondence view is referred to as “expressive realism” (Belsey 1980). The central underpinning tenet of this theory is the common sense assumption that language is a transparent, innocent and neutral medium which reflects an external, pre-existing reality. Like the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis*, this theory posits that language imitates and presents the world as it is and that there is a simple, fixed relationship between objects in the world, words in a language, and concepts in people's minds. Importantly, neither individual nor social change occur *in* language but precede it and are then reflected by it. The world consists of independently existing objects and its concrete manifestations can be clearly recognised and categorised with people using language to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings which are, as Harris points out, “treated as standing for objects, properties and relations in the external world, as perceived by the senses” (1990: 2). In this view language is capable of representing reality neutrally and

objectively; in the separation of language from ideology, expressive realism ignores the fact that language is always ideologically grounded. In summary,

this outlook yields a notion of language as an aggregate of separate units called “words”, each of which somehow has a separate “meaning” attached to it, the whole attached to a *diachronic* or historical dimension which makes it subject to observable and recordable laws of change. (Hawkes 1977: 19)

The second central assumption of the correspondence theory is that the individual is an autonomous and unified subject who is not created in language but exists prior to it as the unified psyche who is the origin and source of meaning. Meaning is located outside of language and history and the social interaction which constitutes it. In the context of this theory, text is something which “tells a (or the) truth, as perceived by an individual subject (the author), whose insights are the source of the text’s single and authoritative meaning” (Belsey 1980: 3). These two central assumptions, that language is transparent and neutral and that the individual is unified and free to create meaning are seriously questioned by structuralist thinking and then fundamentally undermined by post-structuralism.

A problem encountered by theorists who foreground the social construction of language, and its relationship to power and ideology, has been the dominance within mainstream Applied Linguistics, of the correspondence theory of language. Although there has been extended debate about the precise relationship between Linguistics and Applied Linguistics (see, for example, Corder 1973; Crystal 1981; Widdowson 1979), there has not, until very recently, been significant debate around the ideological base of Applied Linguistic theory. As Pennycook points out

One of the problems with Applied Linguistics . . . has been its divorce from educational theory and the tendency to deal with language teaching as a predominantly psycholinguistic phenomenon isolated from its social and educational contexts. (1994: 229)

An example of this can be seen in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research (see, for example, Ellis 1985, 1990; Gardner and Lambert 1972; Krashen 1982, 1985; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; Lightbown and Spada 1993) which tends to view language as a neutral reflection

of social conditions rather than as social practice which itself partially constitutes and perpetuates unequal power relations. While some theorists (for example, Schumann 1976; Spolsky 1989) consider the role of social context on SLA, the relationship between the learner and the social world remains under-analysed (Norton Peirce 1995). Within a correspondence theory of language, SLA is viewed as an individual rather than as a social process. For example, learner motivation (Gardner and Lambert 1972) as a variable is discussed with reference to individual learners but with no reference to the social and political positioning of the learner and the impact that this has on interaction and acquisition. In general then, SLA theorists, partly through their appropriation of a linguistic theory which denies them the necessary explanatory power, “have not adequately explored how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities L2 [second language] learners have to practise the target language outside the classroom” (Norton Peirce 1995: 12).

### 3.2.2 Structuralism

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913) is regarded by many as the founder of structural linguistics. It is his concept of the linguistic sign, described by Coward and Ellis as providing “the founding moment for structuralism” (1981: 154), that marks the beginning of the undermining of correspondence theories and a radical reassessment of the nature and role of language. One of the most revolutionary aspects of his theory is that language is not a way of naming pre-existing objects but what Norris terms “a *differential* network of meaning” (1982: 24). As Saussure points out, “if words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next but this is not true” (1974: 116).

Within Saussurean linguistics the sign is conceived of as an abstract unit which consists of a signifier (a phonological sequence or sound-image) and a signified (a concept). Saussure defines the linguistic unit as “a double entity, one formed by the associating of two terms . . . not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image” (1974: 65-66). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional; there is no natural connection between the two. “Because the sign is arbitrary”, Saussure writes, “it follows no law other than that of



tradition, and because it is based on tradition, it is arbitrary” (1974: 74). Hawkes (1977) explains further that this implies that there is no natural or necessary connection between the sound-image and the signified, or concept, that sounds do not relate in any way to an external “reality” outside of the structure of the language itself .

Most importantly, meaning is relational rather than intrinsic. For Saussure, the proper domain of linguistics is the study of the relationship between signs, which derive their meaning diacritically by being differentiated from other signs:

Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system . . . A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas . . . Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact. (Saussure 1974: 120)

For Saussure, language can be studied both diachronically (historically across time) and, more importantly, synchronically (at a particular moment in time). Closely related to this is his fundamental distinction between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* refers to the abstract rules and conventions of a language system, a system which lies outside social and historical conditions; it has no concrete existence of its own except insofar as can be inferred from the manifestation of individual speech utterances or *parole*. *Parole*, then, consists of speech in concrete situations, but significantly, it is conceptualised by Saussure in individual rather than social terms and is a relatively insignificant aspect of the total underlying system. When a language is learnt it is the underlying system that needs to be assimilated, not simply the construction of discrete utterances. As Culler points out:

Although English utterances may appear to be the only data that the linguist is given, his task is not to study them in and for themselves; they are of interest only insofar as they provide evidence about the underlying system, the English language, which makes it possible to utter and understand them. (1981: xvii)

Saussure argues that language is a self-contained and coherent system consisting of a chain of linguistic signs which themselves generate reality rather than reflect it; they structure the world

rather than represent objects outside themselves. Insofar as different languages divide and articulate the world in different, arbitrary ways, language can now be viewed as a social rather than a natural phenomenon. Harris sums up the shift from correspondence views of language by pointing out that

Language is no longer regarded as peripheral to our grasp of the world in which we live, but as central to it. Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed on an already given order of things. They are collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world. (1990: ix)

In his insistence that meaning is produced within language, which itself is a product of social conventions, Saussure swings the debate about the nature of language towards the social domain. It should be noted, however, that despite the potentially radical nature of his theory, he himself foregrounded the closed and ahistorical system of *langue* and largely ignored explicit discussion of the social. The exploration of the fuller implications of his claims has been left to later interpreters. Belsey, for example, notes that meaning is now “socially constructed, and the social construction of the signifying system is intimately related, therefore, to the social formation itself” (1980: 42).

Within structuralist thought is the beginning of the decentering of the individual: the individual subject is no longer the source and creator of meaning. As Sarup explains “In learning its native language, the child learns a set of differentiating concepts which identify not given entities but socially constructed signifieds. Language in an important sense speaks us” (1983: 47). That language constructs the individual, and can no longer be seen as a natural, taken-for-granted phenomenon, provides the framework for the development of a theory of language as ideology.

Despite his contribution, however, Saussure has been sharply critiqued by subsequent linguists. The first line of critique revolves around his distinction between *langue* and *parole*, which is problematic in several respects. In the first place *langue* assumes traditional notions of homogeneity and unity. Also, it is often unclear where the separation between *langue* and *parole* lies. Furthermore, *langue* is often reified and seen as a real, pre-existing entity rather than as an

ideal construct. Most importantly, the distinction has a fundamental impact on any consideration of the relationship between language and power and for an understanding of material linguistic variation in specific historical conditions. The foregrounding of *langue*, representing as it does a closed, abstract and ahistorical structure implies a stability and a unity of the system which tends to favour and naturalise the practices of dominant groups and exclude any consideration of historically specific, changing and dynamic varieties. It takes no account whatever of the influence of context on meaning, of what Pecheux later highlighted in his central observation that “*words, expressions, propositions etc. change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them*” (1975: 111). As Bennett puts it,

*la langue* is conceived of as a totally unitary system . . . and has no room for the concept of different class-based linguistic practices: that is, of *different communities of speakers who bring different sets of rules into play in their uses of language*. Small wonder that change could not be accounted for. For the very motor of change - conflict and difference had been exiled from the heartland of language. (1979: 72-73)

In the context of this study, the recognition of the implications of different linguistic practices and the importance of articulating rather than ignoring conflict and difference between various groups is a central consideration.

A second and equally crucial line of critique is the post-structuralist argument which centres around the notion of the fixed meaning of the unified sign. Although Saussure argues that the initial relationship between signified and signifier is social and arbitrary, once the relationship has been established, the meaning is located in the sign itself, becomes naturalised and then remains fixed. This means that Saussure’s theory places insufficient emphasis on either plurality of meaning or changes in it. In his analysis, individuals acquire language which consists of signs whose meanings are fixed prior to their articulation in social contexts and which have resulted from an already existing social contract to which what he terms a “community of speakers” (1974: 77) is subject. If such semantic determinism is rejected, however, and the plurality of meaning is accounted for, the nature of the Saussurean sign, and more broadly, what Cameron terms “the whole apparatus of structuralism” (1985: 129) is fundamentally undermined. As she

points out, “where words have more than one meaning, and no meaning is more basic than any other, the one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified which guarantees the unity of the sign is broken down” (1985: 129). Weedon extends this argument by focusing on the poststructuralist approach to the plurality of meaning and change which is to “question the location of social meaning in fixed signs. It speaks instead of signifiers in which the signified is never fixed once and for all, but is constantly *deferred*” (1997: 24).

“Deferral” derives from “*differánce*”, the term given currency by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, who has provided the most sustained and complex critique of the unified linguistic sign. *Differánce* foregrounds the importance of the signifier and fundamentally undermines the idea of pre-existing, fixed and transcendental signifieds. Its sense is located somewhere between the verbs “to differ” and “to defer”. Derrida explains that *differánce*

is a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. *Differánce* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive . . . production of the intervals without which the “full” terms would not signify, would not function. . . . Differences are the effects of transformations, and from this vantage the theme of *differánce* is incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of structure. (1972: 388)

The crucial implication of this is that there can never be any fixed relationship between signified and signifier, that there is a continual disjunction, breaking apart and reconstellating in new combinations of the two and that there is no possibility of a final signified which is not in itself a signifier. As Burbules and Rice point out, “any particular formalisation is for Derrida nothing more than the momentary crystallization and institutionalisation of one particular set of rules and norms - others are always possible” (1991: 400).

Definitive meaning then, is endlessly postponed or deferred, with every articulation of a signifier carrying with it what Derrida terms a “trace” of all previous articulations and impacting on future ones. The sign must be studied as constantly “under erasure”, always in some sense inhabited by another sign or signs which are never fully evident. Sarup summarises the position thus:

One signifier relays me to another; earlier meanings are modified by later ones. In each sign there are traces of other words which that sign has excluded in order to be itself. And words contain the trace of the ones that have gone before. Each sign in the chain of meaning is somehow scored over or traced through with all the others, to form a complex tissue which is never exhaustible. (1992: 36)

Meaning, therefore, is always dispersed throughout a whole chain of signifiers; it is never fully present in a single sign and can therefore be seen as “a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence together” (Sarup 1992: 35-36).

This theory of meaning has crucial implications for the role and definition of writers in relation to text. If it is accepted that writers construct texts on the basis of all other texts they have encountered and that the same applies to readers, then it follows that the meaning of what is written cannot be simply intended by the writer. Harvey contends that

this intertextual weaving has a life of its own. Whatever we write conveys meanings we do not or could not possibly intend, and our words cannot say what we mean. It is vain to try and master a text because the perpetual interweaving of texts and meanings is beyond our control. Language works through us. Recognising that, the deconstructionist impulse is to look inside one text for another, dissolve one text into another, or build one text into another. (1989: 51)

The question of individual intention or agency is a complex one which informed the conceptualisation of this research programme as a whole, student discussions and the interpretation of the data. The extent to which students are in control of their meaning and the extent to which that meaning is a product of a process of interpellation is the subject of ongoing debate.

The debate around the nature of subjectivity leads to the third major criticism of Saussure's work which focuses on his failure to address the constitution of the subject. Coward and Ellis (1981), for example, argue that the rigid distinctions between diachronic and synchronic study, between *langue* and *parole* and between signified and signifier prevent the question of the ongoing productivity of structures and the constitution of the subject from being addressed. The divisions obscure the dynamic, endlessly changing articulation of new signifieds in the signifying chain

and, crucially, the recognition that the subject is produced in this process of productivity, is constructed in the symbol rather than pre-existing it. Saussure does not acknowledge this in his work. Instead, “the question of the constitution of the subject who speaks, is never asked. Throughout, he assumes a pre-given user for the linguistic system which is the object of his analysis” (Coward and Ellis 1981: 163).

### **3.3 Language and the Social**

#### **3.3.1 Subjectivity**

The criticism of Saussure’s failure to address the constitution of the subject also brings the debate about the nature of language squarely into the social domain. Within post-structuralist thinking, subjectivity is defined by Weedon as a term used to “refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (1997: 32).

As opposed to the humanist view of a transcendental, unified and fixed subject which awaits articulation and expression, poststructuralism posits a fragmented, decentered subjectivity “which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon 1997: 32). The significance of the decentering of the subject is that it allows for possibilities of change: it acknowledges that subjectivity is historically and socially produced rather than pre-existing and essential, and that its forms change in shifting discursive contexts. It is therefore also possible that an individual can be the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity. As Belsey explains:

The subject is . . . the site of contradiction, and is consequently perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a *process* lies the possibility of transformation. (1980: 65)

The implications of these claims are significant in the context of this thesis. A black, first year female student, for example, may be a submissive daughter in the context of a rural black family and a student activist in the university context. A black male student may be dominant in the

context of his family and his personal relationships, yet submissive and disempowered in the context of a university residence. In the construction of student behaviour or responses within university discourses, these are crucial considerations. Student silence, for example, could well be the result of a choice not to speak to particular lecturers rather than the outcome of authoritarian educational structures which have “silenced” the students. It also impacts on the way in which oppression is constructed; it is now possible for one individual to be oppressed in some contexts but not in all. A black, first year woman student may be disempowered in most situations, in relation to her father, lover and the church, for example, as well as in the society at large. She may, however, be the acknowledged leader in a specific university society or club or adopt a central and shaping role in her rural home where male members are absent and women take up powerful domestic and social positions. She is constituted and constitutes herself in different ways depending on her particular discursive conditions. And crucially, her subjectivities are constituted in discourse. Belsey, drawing on the work of Emile Benveniste, argues that

it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as “I”, as the subject of a sentence. It is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects. (1980: 59)

Benveniste develops the argument further. Returning to Saussure’s definition of language as a system of differences with no positive terms, he contends that, if this is the case, then it follows that the “I” can refer only to the subject of each separate articulation, whether written or spoken. Derrida too, recognises the implications of Saussure’s claim, arguing that “the subject . . . is inscribed in language . . . he is a function of the language. He becomes a *speaking* subject only by conforming his speech . . . to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences . . .” (1973: 145-146).

It is important to note that while subjectivity is constituted in language and can only have meaning in specific, historical discourses, language itself is dependent for its effects on the actions of individuals who take up particular subject positions and act on them. It is important to acknowledge with Weedon that

The individual is both the site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity and, at any particular moment of thought or speech, a subject, subjected to the regime of meaning of a particular discourse and enabled to act accordingly. The position of subject from which language is articulated and from which speech acts, thoughts or writing appear to originate, is integral to the structure of language and, by extension, to the structure of conscious subjectivity which it constitutes. (1997: 34)

There are two further points to note here. The first is that if individuals are constituted as subjects in discourse, or indeed in multiple, possibly contradictory discourses, then, while it may be possible to be constituted in one discourse at the expense of another, it is never possible to step outside discourse altogether. As Belsey points out, “to do so would be to refuse to act or speak, and even to make such a refusal, to say ‘I refuse’, is to accept the condition of subjectivity” (1980: 62). The crucial point here is that individual writers or researchers must always interpret from within the discourses that construct them.

The second point relates to the range of subject identities available to an individual. Weedon notes that it should, in principle, be possible for people to have access to unlimited forms of subjectivity but that in practice, this is powerfully controlled by historical and social factors. She argues that

social relations, which are always relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions, will determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background. (1997: 91)

This insight has far reaching implications for an analysis of the university context. When formulating affirmative action policies, for example, or when interpreting the “equal opportunity” clause in the university Mission Statement, the historical and social conditions which constrain different groups to varying degrees must constantly inform interpretations.



### 3.3.2 The Bakhtin Circle

Members of the Bakhtin circle were the first theorists to focus on the dialogic nature of utterance and discourse and, also in sharp contrast to the Saussurean position, to develop the ideological dimension of language (see what Pennycook describes as the “sign as a site of multivocality and struggle” (1994: 31). Vološinov<sup>17</sup> concurs with Saussure that a discipline should be created in order to study signs within society, but he fundamentally disagrees about the *nature* of the sign and its role in society. In this, he provides a particularly sharp critique of the structuralist position. He terms it “abstract objectivism” (1973: 48), by which he means language viewed as “an orderly system pervaded by laws of a specifically linguistic nature”. This view of language assumes “an immutable unity” and “*discontinuity between the history of language and the system of language*” (1973: 54). Pennycook summarises Vološinov’s articulation of abstract objectivism as one which gives

precedence to stability over mutability of form, to the abstract over the concrete, to systematization over historical actuality, to the forms of elements over the form of the whole, to the reification of isolated elements over the dynamics of speech and to the singularization of word meaning over the living multiplicity of meaning and accent. Language is taken to be a ready-made artifact handed down from one generation to another and cannot account for creativity or difference. (1994: 30)

For Vološinov “the divorce of language from its ideological impletion is one of abstract objectivism’s most serious errors” (1973: 71). He insists that language, and the signs that constitute it, must always be viewed as constructed within the domain of social interaction which is contested terrain. For him, “Every ideological sign - the verbal sign included - in coming about through the process of social intercourse, is defined by the *social purview* of the given time period and the given social group” (1973: 21).

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17. There is considerable uncertainty about the authorship of these texts. For example, a key text, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* appeared in 1929 under Vološinov’s name but is thought by some to have been written by Bakhtin. In this thesis, for ease of reference, works are referred to using the names under which they have been published.

As he puts it, “*the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organisation of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction*” (1973: 21, italics in the original) and further, “*linguistic creativity cannot be understood apart from the ideological meanings and values that fill it*” (1973: 98).

Language is now removed entirely from the realm of an abstract, closed system and placed fully within the socio-political domain, a domain in which “the meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context” (1973: 79), one in which meaning is multiple, contested and unstable, belonging not to the word itself but “to a word in its position between speakers” (1973: 102). The possibility of any fixed relationship between the signifier and the signified is now totally undermined and is replaced instead by discontinuity, severing and re-constellating; there is what Hall calls “the perpetual slippage of meaning” and “the endless sliding of signifiers” (1985: 92).

From this perspective, the concept of an autonomous, intentional self is replaced by a decentred self which is constituted in social contexts (see 3.3.1). Stam, in a discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin himself, points out that for Bakhtin

A self is constituted by acquiring the ambient languages and discourses of its world. The self, in this sense, is a kind of hybrid sum of institutional and discursive practices bearing on family, class, gender, race, generation and locale. Ideological development is generated by an intense and open struggle within us for hegemony among the various available verbal and ideological points of view, direction and values. (1988: 120)

One of the central concepts in Bakhtin’s thinking is what he terms dialogism. By this he means that meaning is never monological but always generated and produced by social voices anticipating and answering each other. All meanings are understood as part of the greater whole where there is constant interaction between them and each has the potential to impact on and condition the others. As Bakhtin explains:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of the utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social

dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it. (1981: 276)

Meaning then, does not exist in linguistic forms but rather in the use of language in action and communication, in what Bakhtin calls the “situated utterance”. Social voices represent distinct socio-ideological positionings and exist in a conflictual relationship with each other. This conflictual relationship stands at the centre of language change, what he terms heteroglossia. Every social community is marked by heteroglossia where language is the domain in which differently oriented perspectives, or what Bakhtin calls “accents”, come into conflict. As Stam explains

Heteroglossia refers to the dialogically-interrelated speech practices operative in a given society at a given moment, wherein the idioms of different classes, races, genders, generations and locales compete for ascendancy. It refers, further, to the shifting stratifications of language into professional jargons (lawyers, doctors, academics), generic discourses (melodrama, comedy), bureaucratic lingos, popular slangs, along with the specific languages of cultural praxis. (1988: 121)

As has been shown, the structuralist perspective foregrounded homogeneity within a unitary linguistic system and therefore tended towards the standardisation of a single system, and by extension, the exclusion of those speakers outside the system. Crucially, the opposite is now the case. Bakhtin’s emphasis on heteroglossic trends highlights diversity and variety, thus opening the possibility of a range of competing varieties alongside each other. In the South African context, the idea of linguistic diversity and the possibility of contesting varieties, is a key concern. For several decades, the domination of standardised versions of English and Afrikaans (the two official languages until 1994) precluded even potential linguistic contestation and resulted in the exclusion of the majority of the population from social, educational and political domains. This research is not directly concerned with the debate around standardisation but ideas about the value and equitable development of all languages (Alexander 1995a, 1995b; Heugh 1995), the question of medium of instruction (Cummins 1984,1996; Luckett 1993) and the importance of access to languages of power (Angelil-Carter 1995; Delpit 1988; Janks 1995; Pennycook 1995), contribute significantly to the total context of the research and have therefore impacted on its conceptualisation.

In addition to the central ideas of dialogism and heteroglossia, and directly related to them, Bakhtin is noted for his conceptualisation of what he terms “translinguistics” (1986) or, as it is currently termed, “intertextuality”, which means “the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history” (Kristeva 1986: 39). This implies that texts, as well as anticipating future texts, are constituted from other already constructed texts and from potentially diverse and hybrid text types. As Fairclough notes

One justification for an approach to discourse analysis which centres intertextuality and interdiscursivity, and associated notions such as the heterogeneity and ambivalence of discourse is that contemporary orders of discourse are full of such hybrid texts. (1992c: 222)

Any text represents a tension between repetition and creation, between the need to draw on already established conventions and the specificity of context which can result in novel approaches. Bakhtin’s work highlights the extent to which texts and utterances are shaped by prior texts that they are responding to and those that they anticipate. Kress illustrates this tension in his description of the task of a writer which is “the creation of a new text, which while it is entirely constructed in the conventions of genre, of discourse, of writing, of inter-textuality, is also new in being the text appropriate to and arising out of one specific social occasion” (1985: 49).

The claim that texts always exist in intertextual relations with each other also implies an insistence that they be viewed from a socio-historical perspective, rather than in the more decontextualised manner which is typical of Applied Linguistics.<sup>18</sup>

Several aspects of the work of the Bakhtin Circle are of key significance to this thesis. The contextualisation of meaning as potentially contested within social contexts is central to the conceptualisation and implementation of the research programme. Of equal importance is the notion of intertextuality which informed both the development of the programme and the interpretation of the data (see 6.4.4).

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18. For a particularly interesting practical application of the notion of intertextuality in a classroom context, see Morgan (1997).

### 3.3.3 Language and Ideology

#### 3.3.3.1 Introduction

The poststructuralist foregrounding of the notion of the individual as both subject and subjected in the context of specific asymmetrical power relations, underscores the importance of framing any discussion of subjectivity broadly within a critical theory of ideology and, more specifically, in terms of Althusser's (1971b) notion of interpellation.<sup>19</sup> Before turning to a discussion of the relationship between language and ideology, however, it is important to indicate the precise way in which the notion of ideology is appropriated in the context of this thesis.

The work of Pennycook (1994; 1995) offers significant cautionary comment about the implications of the term "ideology" as it is frequently used and understood. With other critics, he argues that many critical discourse analysts rightly foreground the inequalities which characterise social relationships but that at times they tend to emphasise economic factors and therefore oversimplify and reduce the complexity of these relationships. For Pennycook

While we should never lose sight of material and socio-economic inequalities, there is a danger that by making economic class relations primary, we lose sight of other sites of inequality . . . construct an over-simplified version of society whereby a "dominant group" has power while the "oppressed" do not, and become too deterministic in ascribing causality to socio-economic relations. (1995: 125)

This view of ideology results in the positing of a "real" world that is misrepresented and skewed by ideology. As Pennycook points out, "while all language is seen as ideological, there is nevertheless a 'real' world beyond such 'misrepresentation'" (1995: 125). The underlying assumption here is that there can be ideological representation and non-ideological representation. In order to avoid these pitfalls, Pennycook argues strongly for a theoretical

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19. Within the context of this thesis, and in the face of the complexity of the study of ideology, it has been necessary to make careful choices which will not only contribute towards a more precise description of this particular context but will also provide some of the conceptual tools for the analysis and interpretation of the language programme under discussion. Each of the concepts considered here, therefore, will have a direct bearing on later discussion.

framework which foregrounds discourse as power/knowledge (see 2.3) and rejects “ideology” as an analytical construct.

In the introduction to a recent work, Fairclough (1995a) once again specifically ties ideology to unequal relations of power and domination though not only to economic relations. He does, however, concede the earlier tendency within the Marxist tradition (though not in his own work) to foreground class power and domination but notes that latterly “There has also been a relative backgrounding of social class as the focus has shifted to the role of ideology in securing domination especially in gender relations, and in relations between cultural/ethnic groups” (1995: 18). While he agrees that an understanding of the mechanisms of ideology needs to be expanded to include, for example, gender and race, he nevertheless insists that analyses of social domination are located “*within a social system* which is capitalist, and dominated by - but not reducible to - relations of class” (1995a: 18).

It is Fairclough’s view that an uncritical acceptance of Foucault’s analysis of power, which foregrounds its ubiquitous nature and argues that it cannot be possessed by any single group, can result in unequal relations of domination being obscured and under-estimated. He insists that “an important objective for critical analysis is the elision of power/domination in theory and analysis” (1995: 17).

With regard to the criticisms around the truth claims of ideology, Fairclough does not explicitly claim privileged access to the “truth”. He insists, however, that a pejorative view of ideology is an essential ingredient of a critical theory and that

particular representations of the world *are* instrumental (partly in discourse) and important in reproducing domination, they do call for investigation and critique and the force and specificity of the concept of ideology has come from its deployment in the critique of these particular processes. (1995a: 17)

In this thesis it is argued that, as long as ideology is carefully and precisely defined, it is not incompatible with a view of discourse as power/knowledge. Foucault’s analysis of the capillary nature of power and its multiple sites of contestation throughout all social structures and

institutions is accepted, as is the notion that all social groups have the potential to utilise the mechanisms of power. At the same time, however, it is acknowledged that some groups have greater access to social and economic resources than others and that this results in political, economic and social domination. Therefore, even given the ubiquitous nature of power, asymmetrical social relations do exist and these should not be overlooked. In this thesis, discourse as power/knowledge is utilised as an analytical construct but the notion of ideology *insofar as it refers to mechanisms that sustain asymmetrical power relations*, at all levels of society and in terms of a range of social variables, including gender, race, age and class is also retained. It is acknowledged that all discourses are ideological in that they select and foreground particular perspectives to the exclusion of others, and that there is therefore no privileged “non-ideological” discourse which provides access to “reality” beyond ideology. However, not all discourses are equally instrumental in perpetuating and sustaining unequal power relations or, as Eagleton, who rejects a critical theory of ideology, puts it, “by no means all ideologies are oppressive and spuriously legitimating” (1991: 6). In this thesis a critical notion of ideology is adopted though those which are less inclined towards oppressive tendencies (many feminist discourses, for example) are not discussed here.

### **3.3.3.2 Althusser: Ideology and the Process of Interpellation**

Althusser’s notion of interpellation (1971b), the naming that constructs individuals as subjects in society is a key concept which is frequently appropriated by theorists and incorporated into studies of ideology. Before discussing it, however, it is important to make two contextualising comments. Firstly, it is important to note that Althusser’s notion of ideology moves beyond the idea which views it as false consciousness or a set of illusions. For him, it is real and lived in so far as it is a set of actual practices in which the individual takes part. This reality, however, is a particular image of society which provides a subject with an identity and a position in that social structure (see also 3.3.1)

As Belsey explains

ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world - real in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence, but imaginary in that it discourages a full understanding of these conditions of existence and the ways in which people are socially constituted in them. (1980: 57)

Secondly, it should be noted that while Althusser's focus is on the class struggle and the reproduction or transformation of economic social relations, in the context of this thesis, his argument can be read within the broader context of a wider range of forms of domination, including gender, race, age as well as class.

In his essay, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971b), Althusser takes as the point of departure for his approach to ideology, the processes through which capitalist societies are reproduced. He argues that at the ideological, political and economic levels of society, the State ensures the creation of optimum conditions for the reproduction of capitalist relations. It does this by means of two sets of institutions, Repressive State Apparatuses, which include the police and the military and Ideological State Apparatuses like the church, the law, the family, education and the media. Each of these ideological apparatuses, backed up by Repressive State Apparatuses, reproduce submission to the conventions and traditions of the dominant order and articulate the perspectives of the ruling group as "common sense". Common sense here refers to activities or circumstances that appear self-evident or natural precisely because they are the result of powerful ideological processes. It is defined by Gramsci as "the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch" (1971: 322). Each apparatus reproduces these conditions in its own specific way, for example, "the political apparatus by subjecting individuals to the political state ideology . . . the communications apparatus by cramming every citizen with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc . . ." (Althusser 1971b: 146).

The primary means by which Ideological State Apparatuses sustain and perpetuate dominant meaning is in and through language. Control of individuals in the interests of the ruling class is



achieved by a process of their interpellation as subjects within a particular practice or set of social and linguistic practices, the constitution of their subjectivity in language. The term “subject” in Althusser’s writing has a double sense. One refers to the self-initiating aspect of particular behaviour, while the other highlights the fact that individuals are themselves subjected to that behaviour. Althusser argues that while individuals may perceive their subjectivity as natural, it is in fact a function of ideology:

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 does not cause any problems - is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect. (1971: 171-172)

Althusser insists that the interpellation of individuals as subjects is a feature of all ideology. He suggests that

ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it recruits subjects among the individuals . . . or “transforms” the individuals into subjects . . . by that very precise operation . . . called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!” . . . The hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognised that the hail was “really” addressed to him, and that “it was *really him* who was hailed” (and not someone else). (1971: 174)

The result of the process of interpellation is that individuals assume the position of subject in ideology but, crucially, consider themselves to be the originators of that ideology. To that extent, the relationship between the individual and the subject position is imaginary. As Weedon explains

the individual assumes that she is the author of the ideology or discourse which she is speaking. She speaks or thinks as if she were in control of meaning. She “imagines” that she is indeed the type of subject which humanism proposes - rational, unified, the source rather than the effect of language. It is the imaginary quality of the individual’s identification with a subject position which gives it so much psychological and emotional force. (1997: 31)

Althusser's theory of ideology presents a position which is both determined and determining. In fundamental ways the subjects of his discussion are very largely determined within their historical contexts. At the same time, however, as a writer, he is clearly concerned with the human agency which makes his claims possible. His key concept of interpellation has considerable explanatory power and has informed the construction of some of the language activities described below as well as the analysis of the data (6.2.3.1 and 6.4).

### 3.3.3.3 Thompson's Theory of Ideology

One of the writers whose views on ideology have made a central contribution to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and who therefore has bearing on this study is J. B. Thompson (1984; 1990). He rejects the so-called neutral view which separates ideology from power relations and tends to regard it as operating to cement society, binding its members in the collective sharing of a value system. He insists that social systems are constituted instead in diversity, division and conflict and have asymmetrical power relations at their centre. Thompson develops a critical view of ideology arguing that "to study ideology . . . is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination" (1984: 4). Ideology "is concerned with the ways in which meaning is mobilised in the social world and serves thereby to bolster up individuals or groups who occupy positions of power" (1990: 57).

For Thompson, who is a social theorist rather than a linguist, the theory of ideology necessitates a shift of perception from language as a structure used to communicate, to language perceived as a socio-historical phenomenon or social action, which is deeply implicated in human conflict. Quoting Bourdieu, he argues that

Language is not only an instrument of communication or even knowledge, but also an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. Whence the complete definition of competence as *right to speak*, that is, as right to the legitimate language, the authorised language, the language of authority. Competence implies the power to impose reception. (1984: 46-47)

It is primarily through language (and, less significantly, other semiotic systems) “that meaning is mobilised in the defence of domination” (Thompson 1984: 131). Drawing on Austin (1962), Thompson agrees that language “is a way of acting” (1984: 131), but makes the crucial additional point that “ways of acting are infused with forms of power” (1984: 131). He identifies five inter-related modes of operation of ideology which use semiotic systems to sustain and reproduce asymmetrical power relations and then links these to frequent ways in which these processes are evident in social contexts. As Janks (whose reading of Thompson I have found particularly useful in the context of this thesis) points out, “in fact what he is doing is identifying the linguistic and non-linguistic symbols which are regularly used to obtain ideological effects” (1997: 4).

The first of these ideological processes is that of *legitimation*. Here, through an appeal to accepted notions of rationality or long-practised traditions, relations of domination are presented as legitimate. This is usually achieved via three discursive practices, rationalisation, universalisation and narrativisation. For Thompson, rationalisation occurs when “a producer of a symbolic form constructs a chain of reasoning which seeks to defend or justify a set of social relations or institutions and thereby to persuade an audience that it is worthy of support” (1990: 61). Universalisation is the process whereby institutional arrangements which serve the interests of only some, are represented as serving the interests of all, and narrativisation one in which stories (and here Thompson includes histories, films and jokes) present both the past and the present as “part of a timeless and cherished tradition” (1990: 61).

The second process is that of *dissimulation* which Thompson explains thus:

Relations of domination which serve the interests of some at the expense of others may be concealed, denied or “blocked” in various ways; and these ways - often overlapping, seldom intentional - may conceal themselves by their very efficacy, presenting themselves as something other than what they are. (1984: 131)

Displacement is one way of achieving this and occurs when a term usually reserved to refer to one thing is used to refer to another, this in order to impart positive or negative values.

*Unification* is the third ideological process which is described by Thompson as a time when

Relations of domination may be established and sustained by constructing at the symbolic level, a form of unity which embraces individuals in a collective identity, irrespective of the differences and divisions that may separate them. (1990: 64)

This is closely linked to the fourth process, that of *fragmentation*, which works in the opposite way by emphasising, through a strategy of differentiation “distinctions, differences and divisions between individuals and groups, the characteristics that *disunite* them and prevent them from constituting an effective challenge to existing relations” (1990: 65). The fifth way in which ideology operates is by means of *reification*. This process ensures that transitory, historical conditions are presented as though they were permanent, ahistorical and natural. This is done through naturalisation, externalisation, passivisation and nominalisation.

Each of these processes is evident in the context of the university. Although there was not explicit discussion of his work with students, Thompson’s view of ideology informed the development of this research programme and goes a considerable way towards facilitating in students a deeper comprehension of institutional practice. An understanding of the processes of legitimation and reification (see 6.2.3.1), was particularly beneficial both within the context of student discussion and the interpretation of the data.

It should be noted here that Thompson does not consider the discourses of disempowered groups as ideological insofar as they are not part of sustaining asymmetrical power relations. The value of oppositional discursive strategies, however, needs to be considered alongside those discussed above (Janks 1997).

### **3.3.4 Language as Discourse**

One of the most significant, often-emphasised variables in this study and a central feature of post-structuralist thinking, is that research should always be firmly located within its specific historical and social context, which in turn fundamentally impacts on the construction of its meaning. Vološinov (1973), Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Thompson (1984, 1990), Eagleton (1991) and Fairclough (1989, 1992c, 1995a) all foreground the importance of social context, insisting that

ideological significance and meaning lies in the relationship between a text (spoken or written) and its precise social context. As Thompson points out, “there is no linguistic exchange, however insignificant or personal it may seem, which does not bear the traces of the social structure that it helps to reproduce” (1984: 43). Language here is viewed as being produced and received in specific social and historical contexts in which subjects act and interact. It is “a form of social interaction, a meaning potential, in and through which subjects and the social are constructed and reproduced and cultural and human conflict are negotiated” (Threadgold 1986: 16).

There have been many claims regarding the relationship between language and ideology but some of these have failed to take sufficient account of the socio-political context. For Eagleton (1991) it is possible for the same utterance to have ideological significance in one context but not in another. He claims that ideology should be viewed not so much as a matter of language but of *discourse*. This, he explains,

concerns the actual use of language between particular human subjects for the production of specific effects. You could not decide whether or not a statement was ideological or not by inspecting it in isolation from its discursive context . . . . Ideology is less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes. (1991: 9)

The notion of language as discourse is the most fruitful way of fully understanding the ideological processes discussed above. Weedon summarises the position, claiming that within poststructuralism

Language is not transparent as in humanist discourse, it is not expressive and does not label a “real” world. Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language, and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourses. Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist. (1997: 40)

This view can be linked to Pecheux’s articulation of discursive formations. He also argues that meaning is not transparent but that it is “determined by the ideological positions brought into

play in the socio-historical in which words, expressions and propositions are produced (i.e. reproduced)” (1975: 111). He sums up his position thus:

*words, expressions, propositions, etc., change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them, which signifies that they find their meaning by reference to those positions, i.e. by reference to the ideological formations. . . in which those positions are inscribed . . . I shall call a discursive formation that which in a given ideological formation . . . determines what can and should be said. (1975: 111, see also Foucault 1970b)*

Discourse, then, is no longer defined as it is in socio-linguistics as “a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence” (Crystal 1980: 114) nor does it imply an autonomous subject and ideologically neutral language use.<sup>20</sup> Rather, it is “language accented with its history of domination, subordination and resistance . . . it is politicized, power-bearing language employed to extend or defend the interests of its discursive community” (Fiske 1994: 3).

Kress, drawing on Foucault (1970b), speaks of multiple discourses and defines them as

systematically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension - what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution . . . A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. In that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. (1985: 7)

In these terms, educational discourse, including that of the university, ranges from what is said, allowed to be said, and left unsaid in lecture halls, classrooms, residences and tearooms. In its privileging of verbal (as opposed, for example, to visual) texts, it includes what is spoken and

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20. Within Applied Linguistics, key studies in the field of Discourse Analysis include Brown and Yule (1983), Hatch (1978), Hatch and Long (1980), Larsen-Freeman (1980) Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Stubbs (1983) and Widdowson (1979). Although this work has focused on language used in specific contexts, and therefore moved away from a purely linguistic analysis, it has nevertheless been limited by a narrow understanding of broad social and ideological conditions and has failed to explore how and why utterances are made in particular social contexts.

written in every sphere of academic life, from all forms of spoken interaction, both inside and outside the classroom, to official university documents, to admission forms and codes of conduct, to student publications from a wide range of perspectives, to the choice of textbooks and the textbooks themselves, the construction of course curricula and class handouts.

Although this thesis privileges verbal texts, it is also important to note Macdonell's broader view that "whatever signifies or has meaning can be considered part of discourse" (1986: 3-4). She also appropriates the work of Foucault who argues that meanings are encapsulated in technical processes and also in institutions, patterns for general behaviour and in pedagogical forms (Foucault 1970b). From this perspective, a range of other practices contribute to the meaning of university discourse as a "systematically organised set of statements" (Kress 1985: 7) which could include, for example, the ways in which volumes in the library are classified and displayed, the organisation and running of student residences, and the meaning of student protest marches in particular contexts. Also relevant here are other extra-linguistic activities - whether or not there is eye contact between people, for example, or the conventions surrounding making appointments, participating in tutorials, or asking questions in lectures.

It is crucial to note that discourse is not randomly constituted. In the university context underlying discursive conventions guide, for example, the formulation of academic arguments, the construction of teachers' directions and students' responses. It is often invisible rules which help to shape the discursive practices which produce a specific discourse. Again, Foucault's insights are illuminating. He views discursive practice as

a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function. (1972: 117)

As is already evident, the work of Foucault has been of considerable influence in the thinking of many discourse analysts. Indeed, many of his works are devoted to the ways in which discursive practices develop through history and how they are embedded in various social institutions. For him, discourses constitute complex, historically based ways of constructing

knowledge, social practices, subjectivity, the power relations which are implicit in these knowledges and the complex relationships between them.

In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault describes some of the mechanisms that control discourse, one of which he calls “systems of exclusion” (1970b: 55). This includes prohibition - on what may and may not be said, when it may be said and where; revision and rejection, where, for example the discourse of a “mad” person is not treated in the same way as that of a “normal” person. He also discusses the procedures of discursive subjection, ways in which to control and distribute who may speak or be included within discourses. This, he argues, is achieved

by determining the condition of their application, of imposing a certain number of rules on the individuals who hold them, and thus not permitting everyone to have access to them. There is a rarefaction . . . of the speaking subjects; none shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. (1970b: 63)

Foucault identifies four broad constraining categories, which operate from within discourse or from outside it, namely ritual, “societies of discourse” (1970b: 62), doctrinal groups, and what he terms “the social appropriation of discourses” (1970b: 64). Brief discussion of ritual and social appropriation of discourse are relevant here.

For Foucault ritual, which he argues “determines both the particular properties and the stipulated roles of the speaking subjects” (1970b: 62), is the most visible of the restrictive systems. More specifically, ritual

defines the qualification which must be possessed by individuals who speak . . . it defines the gestures, behaviour, circumstances, and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse. Finally, it fixes the supposed or imposed efficacy of the words, their effect on those to whom they are addressed, and the limits of their constraining value. (1970b: 62)

The understanding of dominant norms of behaviour and interaction in the university context is crucial to all students, but most especially to those for whom university discourse is totally unfamiliar and who are communicating in a second language. The primary discourse of the large



majority of second language speakers in South Africa does not include either broad educational discourses or, still less, specific university discourses, nor have their educational experiences, especially in the past, provided easy access to them (Gee 1996, Reynolds 1997; Murray 1993; Starfield 1994). For this reason the need for *explicit* teaching for access to dominant university discourses is of particular importance for these students (see 2.7.2). These ideas were crucial in the design and analysis of this study.

Education systems are part of Foucault's discussion of the social appropriation of discourse. He contends that, ideally, an education system should provide individuals with access to any discourses but that in fact

this does not prevent it from following . . . in its distribution, in what it allows and what it prevents, the lines marked out by social distances, oppositions and struggles. Any system of education is a way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry. (1970b: 64)

Again, the extent that this applies to the university context will emerge as the data is analysed.

For Foucault, the most powerful discourses have institutional bases. Dominant institutional discourse, in an educational context like the university, for example, is usually articulated, maintained and perpetuated by the most powerful group (in the case of Natal University, white, middle-class males) and supported by institutional traditions and practices. It is crucial to note, however, that conflict between discourses is not evidenced in a simple relational way and no underlying unity can be assumed in the discussion of any discourse. Conflict and contestation does not exist only between different fields (like, for example, medicine and education) but also, in complex and convoluted ways, and often more sharply articulated, *within* discourses. In any institution, while certain discursive practices are foregrounded at the expense of others, the total discourse should not be regarded as homogeneous. Within one discursive field there is a distribution and hierarchy of sub-discourses, each carrying different weight and authority. As Weedon points out "the meaning of the existing structure of social institutions, as much as the structures themselves and the subject positions which they offer their subjects, is a site of political struggle waged mainly, though not exclusively, in *language*" (1997: 37).

### 3.3.4.1 Plurality and the Acquisition of Discourse.

In the context of this thesis, one of the central concerns is to develop an understanding of how people become part of the discourses of which they are members and, more specifically, how black students, for whom the university environment is often totally unfamiliar, do so. Gee provides a thought-provoking explanation of this process. He distinguishes between “discourse” as “connected stretches of language which hang together so as to make sense to some community of people” (1996: 90) and “Discourse” which he defines much more broadly as

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’ or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role. (1996: 131)<sup>21</sup>

Gee, following Foucault (1970b), emphasises that all discourses are products of history and that it is more accurate to think, not of individuals speaking but of discourses speaking to each other through individual subjects.<sup>22</sup> As he points out “the individual instantiates, gives body to a discourse every time he or she acts or speaks, and thus carries it, and ultimately changes it, through time” (1996: 132).

Additionally, discourses, in their selection and foregrounding of particular perspectives at the expense of others, inevitably marginalise some groups. They imply a set of values about relationships between groups of people and they entail the (often unequal) distribution of social goods defining membership of the discourse in terms of the identity and belonging of “insiders” and “outsiders.” In addition, they are resistant to internal criticism and define acceptable criticism from within their own parameters. Positions defined by a particular discourse are articulated in

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21. Throughout this thesis, I have used the term “discourse” in this broader sense and will continue to do so rather than to adopt Gee’s distinction between “Discourse” and “discourse”.

22. Claims such as this have resulted in the criticism that Gee’s overall position is over-deterministic and static (see, for example, Moore 1994b; Angelil-Carter and Murray 1996). This criticism, however, should be offset against the tendency in these writers to accord their student subjects with what, in my opinion, is an excessively large degree of individual autonomy. Whatever the failings of Gee’s position, his analysis provides a useful analytical tool with which to understand student experiences of university discourses.

terms of its relationship to other discourses, either insofar as they are similar or oppositional. Crucially, discourses are intimately involved with the distribution of social power and control over certain dominant discourses can lead to the acquisition of, for example, education, power and social status. In South Africa, although learners may be literate in the context of the school and the home (Moore 1994b), they have not had access to the dominant discourses required for success at the university. In the context of this thesis, there is no doubt that the mastery of academic discourses is a key factor in personal success in both economic and public spheres (see 2.7.2 and 3.3.4).

The question of *how* discourses are acquired is of central importance to Gee. He makes an initial distinction between what he terms “primary” and “secondary” discourses. Having acknowledged that the boundary between the two is by no means watertight, and that they can mutually shape and change each other, he nevertheless insists that the two types of discourse are clearly distinguishable. Primary discourses, which are fundamentally rooted in an oral domain

are those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their socio-cultural settings. Primary Discourses constitute our first social identity, and something of a base within which we acquire or resist later Discourses. (1996: 137)

On the other hand, secondary discourses

are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socializations within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer group socialization - for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices. They constitute the recognizability and meaningfulness of our ‘public’ (more formal) acts. (1996: 137)

These secondary discourses, then, go beyond the institution of the family which is so central to primary discourses. Of crucial significance is that they necessitate interaction with unfamiliar people or groups, with those with whom shared knowledge and experience cannot be simply assumed or “they involve interactions where one is being ‘formal’, that is, taking on an identity that transcends the family or primary socializing group” (1996: 143, see 4.3.1 for an example of this).

In his argument about attaining various discourses, Gee appropriates the distinction between acquisition and learning first used by Krashen (1982; 1985), a psycholinguist, in his theory of second language learning. Acquisition here is viewed as a subconscious process which entails no formal teaching and which takes place in meaningful, functional and natural settings. Learning on the other hand, involves formal instruction and the development of conscious knowledge; it involves explanation and analysis, and the breaking down of things into their component parts. For Krashen, the acquisition process is crucial to the attainment of a second language with learning playing an absolutely minimal role. It is important to note that, despite the contentious and contested nature of this distinction (see, for example Ellis 1985; 1990), Krashen carries the debate to an untenable extreme, insisting that there can be no interface between the two processes, that learning, for example, cannot be turned into acquisition. Gee is similar to Krashen only in his foregrounding of the acquisition process, but not in the extent to which he undermines the role of learning. While he concedes that claims about second language acquisition versus learning remain controversial, he insists that in the case of becoming part of a previously unknown discourse community, the process of acquisition is of primary importance. He argues that people are better at performing what they have acquired but that they know more about what they have learned. For him

Discourses are *mastered* through acquisition not through learning. That is, Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction, but by enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse. (1996: 139)

It is the focus on the unconscious process of acquisition, the apprenticeship (immersion within the discourse alongside those who are already familiar with it) which is key here. The classroom, in the first instance is useful, not as the place where overt teaching takes place, but as part of the apprenticeship process. As Gee points out

Acquisition must (at least, partially) precede learning; apprenticeship must precede overt teaching. Classrooms that do not properly balance acquisition and learning, and realise which is which, simply privilege those students who have already begun the acquisition process outside the school. (1996: 139)

So while Gee foregrounds the role of acquisition, implicit in this argument is the acknowledgement that acquisition and learning can be mutually influential. Once a context for acquisition of secondary discourses has been established, Gee, unlike Krashen, argues that learning plays a significant role within it. While “too little acquisition leads to too little mastery-in-practice, too little learning leads to too little analytic and reflective awareness and limits the capacity for certain sorts of critical reading and reflection” (1996: 139). The New London Group (1996) and Cope and Kalantzis (1993) emphasise the importance of explicit teaching of powerful discourses and genres, giving learning an even more central role.

What happens in the classroom, then, has a crucial role to play in both processes:

Good classroom instruction . . . can and should lead to meta-knowledge, to seeing how the Discourses you have already got (not just the languages) relate to those you are attempting to acquire, and how the ones you are attempting to acquire relate to self and society. But to do this, the classroom must juxtapose different Discourses for comparison and contrast. ( Gee 1996: 141)

When classrooms provide a context in which students learn the meta-language necessary for discussion and comparison of different discourses, then they are providing the possibility of what Gee terms “liberating literacy” (1996: 145 and see 6.2.2).

The extent to which it is possible to clearly distinguish acquisition from learning or to know with any certainty “which student has acquired what” is disputable, but Gee’s broad argument is worth noting. It is important to realise that any explicit exposure to the mechanisms underlying discourse, whether linguistic or not, cannot be sufficient to provide total access to a discourse. In the university context, for example, students, simply by living in and experiencing the environment, would have to have begun a process of apprenticeship into university discourses before there could be any overt teaching about conventions and discursive practices. In the context of an ongoing apprenticeship or “immersion” experience, however, learning about the underlying conventions and realising that these are socially constructed, can be of crucial value in the overall understanding of a particular discourse or set of discourses. The critical language

awareness programme described and analysed in Chapters Five and Six needs to be defined within these parameters<sup>23</sup>.

### **3.4. Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### **3.4.1. Introduction**

Many of the ideas discussed above are integral to an understanding of CDA which is primarily concerned with explaining the relationship between language, ideology and power. The postmodernist notions of multiplicity and partiality as well as Foucault's articulation of the capillary nature of power contribute to the broad conceptual framework while the social (and conflictual) nature of the sign (Vološinov 1973), the central, defining role of context (Clark and Ivanič 1997; Eagleton 1991; Fairclough 1992c, 1995a and b; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fiske 1994; Pecheux 1975; Vološinov 1973) and the notion of multiple subjectivity (Belsey 1980; New London Group 1996; Weedon 1997; Henriques et al 1984) are central constructs which inform an understanding of this critical perspective. In addition, the notion of ideology understood as the study of asymmetrical power relations (Thompson 1984, 1990), the link between ideological processes and language and the idea of language as discourse (Fairclough 1989, 1992c, 1995a, Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fiske 1994; Gee 1996; Kress 1985; Pennycook 1994, 1995) each have immediate, and interrelated bearing on CDA. It is therefore important to insert these key debates and definitions into the following discussion.

In a review of CDA, Pennycook notes that while different analysts reveal some differences in emphasis

they share a commitment to going beyond linguistic description to attempt explanation, to showing how social inequalities are reflected and created in language, and to finding ways through their work to change the conditions of inequality that their work uncovers. (1995: 121)

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23. Reynolds and de Klerk (1998) use Gee's model as the basis for their understanding of the acquisition process of academic literacies of two ESL students at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa.

This shared perspective revolves around the key concept of language as discourse or “social practice” (Fairclough 1989: 1), the fact that language practice is socially determined; it is a social act in itself which is in turn shaped and constructed by broader social and ideological conditions. Within this perspective, texts are viewed as social products and human subjects, because they have differential access to social, educational and political experiences, are differentially positioned in various social contexts. Because of this, discourse analysts always foreground issues of ideology and social power in their linguistic analyses. In short, CDA embodies “an understanding of humans as socialized; human subjectivities and language use are produced within particular social and cultural contexts, contexts in which ideological forms and social inequalities abound” (Pennycook 1995: 123).

### **3.4.2 Fairclough’s Model for Critical Discourse Analysis**

The work of Fairclough (1989; 1992c; 1995a; 1997), referred to frequently throughout this thesis, is a key exemplar of this position. He argues that “language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power” (1989: 15). As a linguist, he uses the term discourse to refer to “spoken or written language use” (1992c: 62) but crucially regards “language use as a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables” (1992c: 63).

For him

discourse is a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation . . . discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels . . . On the other hand discourse is socially constitutive [and] contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape or constrain it . . . Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning. (1992c: 63-64)<sup>24</sup>

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24. See also Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) for a very similar definition of discourse.

The constitutive aspects of discourse include a contribution towards the construction of subjectivity (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2), social relationships between people and systems of value and knowledge. Fairclough insists that the relationship between discourse and social structure should be dialectically conceptualised in order to balance the social determination of discourse on the one hand with discursive construction of the social on the other (see also Fairclough and Wodak 1997).

For Fairclough, discourse is also, crucially, a mode of political and ideological practice integrally bound up with power relations:

Discourse as a political practice establishes, sustains and changes power relations, and the collective entities (classes, blocs, communities, groups) between which power relations obtain. Discourse as an ideological practice constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations. (1992c: 67)

Within this notion of discourse, Fairclough identifies critical goals for discourse analysis. For him, the primary goal of critical discourse analysis is to uncover naturalised ideological representations which he defines “as ideological representations which come to be seen as non-ideological ‘common sense’” (1995a: 28). To adopt critical goals

means aiming to elucidate such naturalizations and more generally to make clear social determinations and effects of discourse which are characteristically opaque . . . The critical approach has its theoretical underpinnings in views of the relationship between ‘micro’ events (including verbal events) and ‘macro’ structures which see the latter as both the conditions for and the products of the former, and which therefore reject rigid barriers between the study of the ‘micro’ (of which the study of discourse is a part) and the study of the ‘macro.’ (1995a: 28)

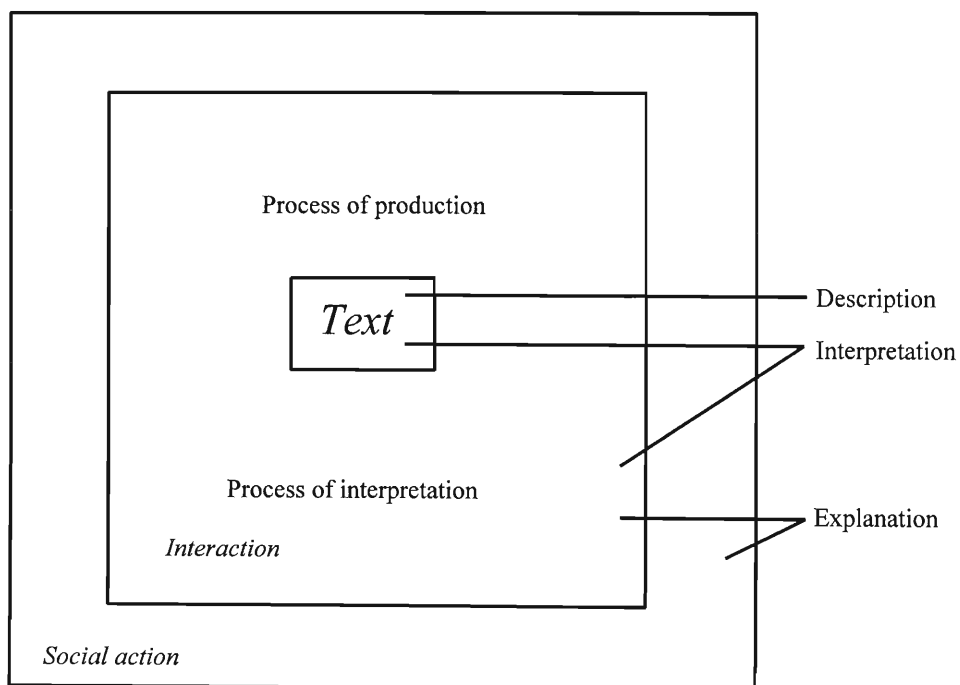
From a critical perspective, verbal interactions (both written and spoken) are viewed as a form of social action which presuppose a range of structures (or background knowledge) which includes social structures, different settings, language codes and norms for language use. These structures are not only presupposed by and necessary for action but are themselves products of action. For Fairclough, the “adoption of critical goals means, first and foremost, investigating



verbal interactions with an eye to their determination by, and their effects on, social structures” (1995a: 36).

In his development of a method for critical discourse analysis (see Figure 1), Fairclough argues for a three dimensional model (1989; 1992c; 1995a) that includes a descriptive dimension which entails close textual and linguistic analysis, an interpretive dimension which focuses on an analysis of text and its interaction with the processes of production and reception and an explanatory dimension which foregrounds the relationship between this interaction and the broad social context. It is important to note that although these stages are dealt with in a somewhat “linear” fashion, moving from the small text to the broad social context, the analysis of a text can begin at any point on the model (Janks 1997).

**Figure 1: A Three-Dimensional View of Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1989)**



Fairclough insists that detailed textual analysis (the descriptive aspect), as opposed, for example, to a purely social analysis, is a crucial and enriching aspect of critical discourse analysis (1992c; 1995a). He notes, however, that “description presupposes interpretation” (1989: 109) and that

the distinctions should be viewed as a procedural convenience rather than representing discrete, easily defined categories.

The descriptive dimension of the analysis includes two kinds of textual analysis, linguistic and intertextual. Linguistic analysis involves both the traditional levels of analysis in terms of phonology, vocabulary, syntax and semantics and analysis of textual organisation in a broader sense which includes the sequencing of information and intersentential cohesion. Drawing on the work of Halliday (1978; 1985) Fairclough asserts that the formal features of texts have an experiential, relational and textual value which are related to three aspects of social practice - systems of knowledge and belief, social relationships and identity, and textuality respectively.

Although Fairclough claims that the formal features of texts are linked to aspects of social practice, he nevertheless warns of the dangers of direct extrapolation from textual features to the broader social context (1989). He insists on the *mediated* nature of the relationship between text and social structure. It is mediated first by the discourse of which the text is a part and secondly by the social context of the discourse. He argues that texts only become “socially operative if they are embedded in social interaction, where texts are produced and interpreted against a background of common-sense assumptions” (1989: 140). These discourse processes form the basis for the second dimension of his model, interpretation.

Texts for Fairclough are mediated by both the discourses of which they are a part and the broader social context. The process of interpretation is viewed as a dialectical interplay between various features of texts (from the social context to phonological representations) and what he terms “members’ resources” (1989: 11). He uses the term members’ resources (as opposed to schema theory or “background knowledge”) to refer to resources used by subjects to produce and interpret text. These resources, as opposed to being cognitive schema are, for Fairclough, socially constructed and ideologically shaped:

they are social in the sense that they have social origins - they are socially generated, and their nature is dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated - as well as being socially transmitted and . . . unequally distributed . . . People internalise what is socially produced and made. . . available to them . . .

This gives forces which shape societies a vitally important foothold in the individual psyche. (1989: 24)

The implications of this are that students' "frames of reference", as they are called in *Learning, Language and Logic*, are not brought neutrally to bear on the texts they read and interpret; they are ideologically constructed and therefore socially constrained.

The interpretative process is primarily concerned with the production and interpretation of texts as they emerge in specific social contexts. In the context of this thesis, however, it is the *interpretation* of text which is foregrounded. Interpretation entails a complex interplay between different domains which includes the ability to interpret both situational and intertextual contexts in conjunction with knowledge of the linguistic system, semantic representations, pragmatic conventions, the ability to establish connections within and between utterances and recognition of various generic structures. Intertextual analysis is a central dimension of interpretation which shows how texts draw on *orders of discourse* - the particular configurations of conventionalized practices (genres, discourses, narratives, etc) which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances . . . Intertextual analysis draws attention to the dependence of texts upon society and history in the form of the resources made available within the order of discourse . . . (1995c: 188-189)

While Fairclough claims that different interpretative procedures draw on different aspects of members' resources (for example, knowledge of social orders is linked to the interpretation of situational contexts), the key point is that there is a dialectical interdependence between interpretative domains with each drawing on and influencing the others. He explains this process further in a brief description of the relationship between context and text: "interpreters quickly decide what the context is, and this decision can affect the interpretation of text; but the interpretation of context is partly based upon, and can change in the course of, the interpretation of text" (1989: 145).

Because "ideologies and power relations which underlie them have a deep and pervasive influence on discourse interpretation and production" (1989: 151), interpretations can never be predicted and contexts cannot be taken for granted. Both between and within social groups,

subjects will be constructed differently in different discourse types; they will draw on them in different ways and, as a result, different interpretations are likely to emerge (see 6.4.4).

The third dimension of Fairclough's model is the process of Explanation which has as its objective

to portray a discourse as part of a social process, as a social practice, showing how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them. . . explanation is a matter of seeing a discourse as part of processes of social struggle, within a matrix of relations of power. (1989: 163)

In understanding any text and the discourse of which it is part, the explanatory dimension explores which power relations, at situational, institutional and social levels contribute towards the shaping of the discourse. It also entails a consideration of how a discourse is positioned in relation to struggles at each of these three levels and to what extent it contributes to or transforms existing power relations.

### **3.5 Linguistic Methodologies for Critical Discourse Analysis.**

#### **3.5.1 Introduction**

In the context of this view of ideology and discourse, a theory of language is required to explain how meanings and ideologies are constructed within discourse and how these function to maintain and transmit (or challenge) existing power relations. It is crucial that linguistic theory moves beyond a discursive analysis of the lexico-grammatical and phonological structures of texts and also provides an interpretation of that analysis in terms of the social, historical and institutional conditions in which subjects act and interact and in which discourse is produced and received.

### 3.5.2 Systemic-Functional Grammar

Halliday's theory of language as a social semiotic (1978) and his systemic-functional grammar (1985) have been appropriated by many linguists (most notably by groups in East Anglia and in Australia and also, for example, by Clark and Ivanič 1997; Fairclough 1992c; 1995a and b; Janks 1996; Kress 1985) precisely because it provides the potential for a critical interpretation of linguistic expressions within a variety of discourses. As his point of departure Halliday argues that

language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives . . . . In order to understand linguistic structures in functional terms, we have to proceed from the outside inwards, interpreting language by reference to its place in the social process. (1978: 4)

This, as Threadgold (1987) has pointed out, involves changing the subject of linguistics and the linguistic subject to such an extent that the resulting "critical linguistics" has often been characterised by linguists as "not linguistics" (Fowler 1987: 483).

Briefly, Halliday argues that a language is interpreted as a system of meaning potential, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realised. He defines systemic theory as "a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options" (1985: xiv). Systemic grammar, then, foregrounds linguistic choice and treats structures as derivable from the choices made via realisation rules: "the relation between the semantics and the grammar is one of realisation: the word 'realises', or encodes, the meaning. The wording, in turn, is 'realised by' sound or writing" (Halliday 1985: xx). This concept of realisation enables Halliday to attempt an explanation of the relationship between text and context and to show how the immediate context of situation (the field, tenor and mode of discourse) is realised by the meta-functions of language (the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual) in the broader socio- historical context. The term "context of situation" was coined by the anthropologist Malinowski (cited in Halliday and Hasan 1989) in an attempt to articulate the **total** environment of a text, not only in terms of its verbal expression but in relation to every aspect of the situation in which it was uttered.

For Halliday, a text, in the broadest terms, is “language that is functional” (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 10), that is any language, written or spoken, which has social meaning in a particular, concrete, situation. Crucially, he views text as a semantic unit, an intersection of potential meanings, rather than a combination of words and sentences, and insists that it needs to be considered from two perspectives simultaneously, from the notion of text as product and of text as process. As he explains:

The text is a product in the sense that it is an output, something that can be recorded and studied, having a certain construction that can be represented in systematic terms. It is a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through the network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set. (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 10)

Interestingly, Fairclough, who is generally in broad agreement with Halliday, limits his definition of text to “a product rather than a process - a product of the process of text production” (1989: 24). He then locates this within the broader term “discourse” which he defines as “the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (1989: 24). Fairclough describes this broad process as including, in addition to the text,

*the process of production*, of which the text is a product, and *the process of interpretation*, for which the text is a resource . . . The formal properties of a text can be regarded from the perspective of discourse analysis on the one hand as *traces* of the productive process, and on the other hand as *cues* in the process of interpretation. (1989: 24)

As already noted, a central feature of these productive and interpretative processes is that they are constituted through the interplay between textual properties and the wide range of resources and knowledge brought to bear on them by readers. These resources include linguistic knowledge, constructions of the social world, personal experiences, values, beliefs and assumptions.

The central point to note here, is not the different emphases on what precisely constitutes a text, but rather the insistence on the part of both writers that text must be located in and interpreted as part of much broader discursive practices and its meaning, which will always remain partial,

is “an instance of social meaning in a particular context of situation” (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 11), and constructed by a wide range of linguistic and extra-linguistic features. A text, as Halliday points out, is “a product of its environment, a product of a continuous process of choices in meaning that we can represent as multiple paths or passes through the networks that constitute the linguistic system” (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 11). This general characterisation also needs to enable the description of specific texts in particular social or institutional contexts. Halliday has developed a conceptual framework which he claims facilitates the understanding of the production and interpretation of text, and helps to capture the elusive relation between language and social structure. His point of departure is that the construction of a text is neither random nor mechanical, but is systematically related to both its social environment and the functional organisation of its language. A central question for him, and undoubtedly a vexed one, revolves around the ways in which individual texts interact with and relate to their total social contexts. He identifies three features of the context of situation which he claims are of assistance in deepening understanding of this complex process and which “serve to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged” (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 12).

The first of these is the “field of discourse” which refers to the type of social action being depicted in the text, what the participants are doing. At a semantic level, this is expressed as the experiential function, which involves an understanding of “the processes being referred to, the participants in these processes, and the circumstances - time, cause, etc. associated with them” (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 45). The central linguistic features which realise this function are lexicalisation, transitivity and voice.

The second feature of the context of situation is the “tenor of discourse” which refers to the relationship between the participants in the text, their statuses and roles, the permanent or temporary nature of these relationships and the types of speech roles they are assuming in the dialogue. This also includes the speaker’s/writer’s attitudes towards the subject matter. It is

realised at the semantic level principally as the interpersonal function of language and is linguistically characterised by modality in conjunction with lexical choice.<sup>25</sup>

The third characteristic of the context of situation is the “mode of discourse” which Halliday describes as referring to the role

the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel . . . and also the rhetorical mode . . . (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 12)

For Halliday, the textual component has what he calls “an enabling function” (1978: 113). It is only through the textual mode of discourse that ideational and interpersonal meanings are realised. The key linguistic features here are cohesion and coherence, and information structure, both in terms of theme and rheme, and of given and new information.

It should be noted that the critical dimension, the emphasis on the relationship between language and power, is absent from Halliday's work. It is necessary, therefore, to turn to an account of language that is explicitly articulated in the context of social power relations.

### **3.5.3 From Critical Linguistics to Critical Language Awareness**

Critical Linguistics which, in its recently developed form is now most frequently referred to as Critical Language Awareness (CLA) or critical literacy, is an approach to the learning and teaching of language which should be understood in the context of CDA (see 3.4), the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two and the poststructuralist theory of subjectivity discussed above (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.2). As such it needs to be understood within these broad critical perspectives and, most importantly, in the light of the discussion of the relationship between language, power and ideology (see 3.3.3).

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25. Fairclough (1992b; 1995b) equates experiential meaning with what he terms “representations” and interpersonal meaning he categorises in two ways, as “relations and identities” (1995b:17).



The term “critical linguistics” was used for the first time by Fowler *et al* (1979) and by Kress and Hodge (1979). The approach has added an important new dimension to language teaching and has been substantially developed in recent years. (Chilton 1985; Clark and Ivanič 1997; Fairclough 1989, 1992a, b and c, 1995a; Fowler 1987, 1991; Ivanič 1990; Ivanič and Simpson 1992; Janks 1987, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996; Kress 1985; Menz 1989; Steiner 1985; Wodak 1989). It is primarily engaged in the formulation of a principled account of the relationship between language, power and ideology and with the way in which texts, through the selection of specific linguistic structures and lexical items, encode these relationships and reflect the interests of particular groups of people, most especially the dominant and powerful. For Fowler

Critical Linguistics seeks, by studying the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of the social and historical situation of the text, to display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language - and which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as “natural”. (1991: 67)

It is in terms of the hiddenness of and the (often unconscious) attempt to naturalise specific ideological positions that the term “critical” is defined in this context. Fairclough explains that it is used “in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people - such as the connections between language, power and ideology” (1989: 5) and Wodak expands this notion when she describes the critical linguist as attempting to

uncover and de-mystify certain social processes in this and other societies, to make mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagoguery, and propaganda explicit and transparent [and] . . . to . . . understand how and why reality is structured in a certain way. (1989: xiv)

It would be misguided to claim, however, that the uncovering of hidden ideological assumptions underlying a given text, is in itself sufficient to counteract the subtle and manipulative influence of a particular ideological position. In this regard, Menz provides cautionary comment:

The exposure of ideological linguistic use does not automatically eliminate the effect of ideologies and myths, but in making them explicit it is possible to make them visible to everybody and thus encourage a conscious, i.e. critical, debate about them. (1989: 233)

It is precisely in making hidden meaning *explicit*, in showing “how the detailed structure of language silently and continuously shapes the ideas presented” (Fowler 1991: 231), that critical linguistics can be linked to a pedagogy of access (see 2.7.2). The initiation of critical debate implies at least that the “effect of ideologies” is rendered visible and brings with it the possibility, within determining social and historical constraints, of previously unseen options. It implies that if the construction and intention of dominant conventions and practices can be better understood, they can also be critiqued and either accepted or rejected. In other words, when students begin to understand how dominant discourses are linguistically constructed and how they construct and position them, they have a better chance of gaining access to various discourse communities. This adds an important dimension to the pedagogy of access, the consequences of which, in the context of this study, will become clear in later chapters.

Like other critical disciplines, critical linguistics insists that any enquiry is placed within an evolving historical context. It is acknowledged that while language shapes society, it is itself powerfully shaped by socio-historical conditions. In this, it both complements and moves beyond the notion of communicative competence, a concept developed by Hymes in response to Chomsky’s claim that “linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly” (1965: 3)

Hymes argues that

We have . . . to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. (1979: 15).

Part of a language teacher’s role is certainly to expose students to the appropriate and traditional conventions accepted within various social and educational institutions. Crucially, however, that role extends also to a critique of those conventions (Norton Peirce 1989) and, as a result, increased self-reflection and the development of the confidence to make better informed choices about their intentions and value. Critical language study provides linguistic procedures which can assist in this process. As Fairclough points out, CLA is underpinned by a theory of learning

which stresses the integration of critical language awareness both with past language experience and with the developing capacities of learners, individually and collectively, to engage, not only in conventional but also innovative and unconventional language use. (1995a: 3)

One of the primary strengths of CLA, and one which is of central concern in this thesis, is its focus on the critical reading of texts, not only spoken and written texts but also visual texts. It assists students to see how texts and the discourses of which they are a part, are historically and politically shaped and themselves shape these processes. The key point here is that CLA facilitates an understanding of the *constructed* nature of text which in turn encourages the capacity to unpack a text and to resist particular subject positions suggested by it. As Janks points out

Texts work to constrain possible interpretations, surreptitiously structuring the subjectivity of their ideal readers . . . Where the ideal reader is constituted in and by the writer's discourse, the codes appear natural and given, enabling the text to "transparently" encode the 'real' world. The naturalisation hides the process whereby language constructs and represents reality making it hard to resist the text. (Janks 1995: 137)

One of the central benefits of CLA then, is its potential to help students to become resistant readers (Clarence 1994; Granville 1996; Janks 1995; Kress 1985) and "to help them understand how the linguistic particularities of the texts work to position them and to enable them to consider whose interests these material constructions serve" (Janks 1995: 111). It also encourages students to expect and accept multiple readings, to realise that, because they are socially located, they are contradictory, partial and interested (see, for example, 6.4.5).

The possibility of resisting dominant social practices as they are represented in language explicitly links CLA to emancipatory discourse. The work of Janks and Ivanič is of particular relevance here. In a discussion of the relationship between CLA and emancipatory discourse, they articulate their primary concern as being with

how practices which maintain and reproduce patterns of domination and subordination may be contested, especially language practices. We are concerned

with the part people play in longer-term processes of change and struggle. By examining what it means to read and write from disempowered subject positions in educational institutions we hope to show that changing these language practices can be transformative. When discourse breaks the cycle of reproducing domination it becomes emancipatory. (1992: 305)

CLA involves learners in understanding social situations, in knowing what options are available for alternative practice and, crucially, what the consequences of any oppositional or alternative practice might be. Changed language practice should not, however, be viewed as a simple matter of choice but rather within a conceptual framework underpinned by the notion of multiple subjectivity and one which therefore allows for a dialectic between the determination of the subject and its agency.

The earlier formulations of this approach to language, and termed “critical linguistics” (Fowler *et al* 1979), have been sharply criticised by Thompson. He argues that

their analyses frequently presuppose a specific account of relations between, for example, different classes, races or sexes; but they provide no systematic discussion of these relations and no sustained justification of this account. Instead they tend to assume that by attending to linguistic processes, one can discern, through the deceptive veil of surface forms, the underlying social reality. (1984: 124)

Work done since the publication of *Language and Control* (1979), however, has taken serious cognisance of this objection. Using the term Critical Language Awareness, Fairclough (1989; 1992a, b, and c; 1995a), for example, insists that the understanding and analysis of linguistic constructions in a given text must always be understood within the context of broader discursive practice and that it is only one of three components required for critical discourse analysis. The linguistic description of a text must always be undertaken in conjunction with an interpretation of the interaction between the text and the processes of its production and interpretation and an explanation of that interaction and the social context. Fowler himself, having claimed, with Kress, that meanings are carried and expressed in the syntactic forms and processes, that is . . . the analyst can “read off” meaning from the syntax (1979a: 197), now argues that it is “a fundamental principle of critical linguistics that there is no invariant relationship between form and meaning” (1991: 99) and that

the significance of discourse derives only from an interaction between language structure and the context in which it is used: so the discourse analyst must always be prepared to document the circumstances in which communication takes place, and consider their relevance to the structure of the text. (1991: 90)

In this study, it is argued that the linguistic dimension of critical analysis has often been neglected and that it should be a component of the analysis of social phenomena (Fairclough 1992c). At the same time, however, linguistic analyses of texts should always be read and interpreted within their broader social and discursive contexts. The precise context of a particular research programme which adopts critical action research as its method and utilises procedures for linguistic analysis based on the principles of critical linguistics, is the subject of the next chapter.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Critical Language Programme: Research Methodology and Institutional Context**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. It aims to explicate the research methodology adopted for this study and then to describe the specific institutional and pedagogical context in which the research programme was developed and implemented. Detailed description of the two cycles which constituted the research, their relationship to each other and the analysis of the data, will be the focus of Chapters Five and Six.

#### **4.2 Research Methodology**

##### **4.2.1 Action Research: Definitions and Key Concepts**

The research method adopted in this study is action research or, more precisely, critical or emancipatory action research. Action research (the term was coined in 1946 by Lewin, a social psychologist), was originally developed in the social sciences and has, during the last forty years, become increasingly popular in educational contexts. With this, have come significant theoretical advances (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Hopkins 1985; Hursh 1995; McNiff 1988; Noffke 1994, 1995; Stenhouse 1975; Walker, M. 1990, 1995, 1996).

Whatever the precise focus of individual projects, it is always based on a self-reflective process, on deliberate and systematic cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection, with each of these stages or “moments” (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Grundy 1987; Walker 1996) connected to the other in a complex reciprocal relationship. For Grundy

Reflection looks back to previous action through models of observation which reconstruct practice so that it can be recollected, analyzed and judged at a later time. Reflection also looks forward to future action through the moment of planning, while action is retrospectively informed by reflection through planning. (1987: 145)

As Noffke points out, action research can take place in a wide range of educational contexts and for an array of purposes, ranging from a desire for personal development, an improved knowledge base and a commitment to social critique and political intervention. In turn, any of these emphases within action research can be approached from a range of ideological perspectives. For example, the idea of the “personal” is sometimes viewed as contrasting with social goals while at other times it is construed as “a dimension of constant, situated struggle over issues of identity, knowledge and power” (Noffke 1995: 57). The notion of social critique can also vary greatly:

While some versions of action research advocate attention to interpersonal dynamics or to changes within the existing structures of education, others highlight efforts to effect transformations of institutions, challenging the structures of society themselves. (Noffke 1995: 58)

It should be noted that Noffke distinguishes between these domains to illustrate varying emphases in action research rather than to imply clear and discrete categories. She argues, for example, that individual action should not be seen in opposition to social goals and that researchers should explore the interconnectedness of these dimensions rather than constructing them as opposing traditions within action research.

The diverse application of action research has inevitably resulted in various definitions of the process. Walker (1996) warns, however, that any definitions of action research should be viewed heuristically and not as representative of essential forms of the research. Some focus almost entirely on the classroom context while others link the classroom to the broader social context. Carr and Kemmis, for example, define action research as

simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their practice, their

understandings of these practices and the situation in which these practices are carried out. (1986: 162)

They emphasise two key aims of all action research. The first of these is the notion of *improvement*. It aims at a better understanding of teaching practice and of the situations in which it occurs in order to improve it. Closely linked to this is the second aim, that of *involvement*. Each cycle of the research attempts to involve all participants directly in the process which means that it is essentially participatory in character. More than this, however, the involvement is *collaborative*, focusing not only on the contribution and understanding of individuals but also on collective, group understanding. As Kemmis and McTaggart note, “The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members” (1988: 5). This collaborative approach to research as a joint enterprise also aims to begin to break down the hierarchical nature of the researcher-respondent relationship which is common to other approaches.

#### **4.2.2 Three Modes of Action Research**

On the surface, notions of involvement and participation, collaboration, improvement and change in the interests of justice may appear to imply critical and emancipatory tendencies. This, however, cannot be assumed. Following Habermas (1972), Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Grundy (1987) have identified and explicated three broad “modes” of action research, the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. It should be noted at this point that Habermas’ early work, particularly the theory of “knowledge-constitutive interests” (1972), is frequently appropriated by educational theorists and informs their articulation of current theory. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge its influence here. According to J. B. Thompson, this theory expounds the view that

the logical-methodological rules for the conduct of the various sciences are linked to an interest structure which is rooted in the self-formative process of the human



species, and which prejudices both the possible objects of scientific analysis and the possible meaning of the validity of scientific statements. (1984: 259)

It should also be noted that Habermas has been strongly criticised for postulating hard and fast distinctions when the notion of a continuum would be more apt and when it is sometimes difficult to make easy distinctions between one category and another. Walker (1996), for example, notes the importance of context and argues that what is “practical” in one context can be “emancipatory” in another. However, it has also been argued that while there is inevitable overlap between them, the various kinds of knowledge nevertheless seem to be practically differentiated and can often be clearly identified in the realm of human interaction (Grundy 1987). Certainly the distinctions Habermas draws are often appropriated in the literature on action research and are viewed as illuminating and helpful constructs for locating research in a critical, emancipatory tradition rather than in a positivist or interpretive one. They are appropriated here in order to draw broad distinctions between various kinds of action research. The complex relationships between the three modes and the fact that in practice these relationships are context bound, however, are acknowledged.

Because a variety of emphases is possible, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the different positions which have emerged and of the ideological frameworks which shape them, this in order to illustrate further key features of action research generally and those which mark the emancipatory, critical tradition.

#### **4.2.2.1 Technical Action Research**

The technical form of action research is underpinned by “technical cognitive interest”. Briefly, the object domain here consists of phenomena that can be observed, measured and manipulated in controlled experimental contexts. Through empirical observation, “technical interest” seeks to formulate generalisable observations which provide the basis for prediction and the potential for control and management of the environment. It relates closely to what Habermas calls “technical action” which is concerned with the maintenance and the perpetuation of beneficial

material conditions. Action research located within this domain represents what Hursh calls “an untheoretical exercise in which educators focus on instrumental and technical concerns of developing more efficient classrooms” (1995: 61). Walker defines technical action research as a process which

emphasises rule following, control and a curriculum designed by outside experts, including prepackaged materials. This form promotes efficient and effective practice but in the interests of prediction and control rather than the development of teacher understandings. (1996:24)

“Untheoretical” here should be understood as the exclusion of a consideration of broad socio-political conditions and the power relationships which shape them. Technical action research then, is a tendency towards and an emphasis on concrete classroom conditions linked to an under-analysis of how and why these conditions came about.

#### **4.2.2.2 Practical Action Research**

“Practical” cognitive interest shifts the focus to a different object domain: that of inter-subjective meanings and a concern with procedures for social interpretation. Interpretive social science locates its investigations firmly within specific social contexts, and focuses on a relationship **with** subjects rather than acting on scientifically controlled objects. Although it incorporates a wide variety of positions, the following broad description highlights some of its central features:

Interpretive social science . . . aims to educate: to deepen insight and to enliven commitment. Its work is the transformation of consciousness, the differentiation of modes of awareness and the enlightenment of action. It expects critical reception (that is, it does not take the simplistic view that its truths are unified into single theories which will compel action along predetermined lines), and it aims to contribute to social life through educating the consciousness of individual actors. (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 93)

The knowledge generated by this cognitive interest is “subjective” rather than “objective” but this does not imply that it is arbitrary. Consensual interpretation, the agreement with others about

meaning, is another of its key characteristics and the means by which it validates its research. Practical interest relates to what Habermas terms “communicative action” which endeavours to establish and maintain societal integration through, for example, the establishment of social norms. Action research emerging from this tradition foregrounds teachers’ self-understandings, encourages critical judgement and understanding of decision making about changes in the classroom for the benefit of the pupils (Walker 1996).

Both these modes of action research (and indeed many articulations of emancipatory action research) are informed by the humanist notion of an autonomous and essentialised subject. The resultant limitation is a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the individual in the construction of knowledge and at the expense of acknowledging the ways in which both the individual and what is known and learnt are socially and politically constructed. In this research project, subjectivity is understood within the poststructuralist framework developed in Chapters Two and Three (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2) which implies that the discursive construction of multiple subjectivities is foregrounded in favour of a unified, autonomous self.

#### **4.2.2.3 Emancipatory Action Research**

The third of the constitutive interests is one which Habermas terms “emancipatory”, which foregrounds an interest in freedom and autonomy. At times, it is difficult to distinguish between practical and emancipatory knowledge but when there are *explicit* links with notions of justice and with social transformation in the interests of equity, the knowledge is claimed to be emancipatory. Its concern with social re-construction and critique (already noted in 2.5) is closely linked with the questioning of traditionally legitimised practices and the construction of a critical role for the researcher. This in turn “creates the possibility for reflective opposition to authorities because one is examining the limitations and omissions of theories that serve to legitimize authorities” (Bredo and Feinberg 1982c: 431).

The knowledge generated by emancipatory interest forms the basis for the critical sciences. The key features of this critical position are summarised by Van Dijk thus:

Beyond description or superficial application, critical science in each domain asks further questions, such as those of responsibility, interests, and ideology. Instead of focusing on purely academic or theoretical problems, it starts from prevailing social problems, and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most and critically analyzes those in power, those who are responsible, and those who have the means and opportunity to solve such problems. ( in Wodak 1989: xv)

### **4.2.3 The Role of Social Context in Emancipatory Action Research**

Action research based on emancipatory knowledge “promotes a critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical terms” (Grundy 1987: 162). Any action research which claims to be emancipatory needs to move beyond simplistic notions of improved practice and understanding. It needs to contextualise itself firmly within socio-political contexts and to undercut the singularly pragmatic claims of technical action research. Within the South African context, Walker, who articulates an emancipatory position, is concerned that action research “might be domesticated as improvement without real change” (1990: 58), and result simply in what she describes as “gilding gutter education” (1990: 57). She acknowledges that in a situation where the vast majority of teachers are underqualified and working in grossly inadequate conditions, technically based classroom research has undoubted value, but she nevertheless insists that any action research needs to begin from the political understanding of teachers and to be part of a broader process of social and educational change. For her, “Action research divorced both from an understanding of the structural features of one's society and links with political forces for democratic education must eventually be limited in its effects to improvement without change” (1990: 61).

While she continues to hold this broad position, Walker has tempered her view somewhat since 1990. In her later writing, she admits that she does “not believe that action research can liberate participants in a ‘grand’ sense” (1995: 11) and refers to her earlier “confident assumption” (1996: 26) about the transformatory potential of action research. She acknowledges the difficulties of transferring a Northern model of action research into a Southern context in which teachers simply do not work in a “culture receptive to notions of innovation, of reflective practice and curriculum theorising” (1996: 25) while at the same time insisting that this does not imply that teachers have

no understanding of society but rather that that understanding has no intrinsic links to a process of “improvement”.

Grundy makes a similar point to Walker when she argues that an understanding of social and material contexts is crucial if participants are to acknowledge the social and historical constraints imposed on their practice and be in a position to recognise social interactions which evidence interest in domination and control. A deeper understanding can also bring about the realisation that their own unreflective social practices can themselves entrench and perpetuate unequal social relations:

Emancipatory action research will always be characterised by a critical focus and a willingness to encompass the social context of action within the field of investigation. In this way, emancipatory action research is intrinsically political. (1987: 147)

It is important to note that Habermas does not deny the validity of any of these forms of knowledge. Even more crucial, however, is that it is no longer necessary to view them hierarchically as he does and consider, for example, technical knowledge less important than practical knowledge and both of these inferior to emancipatory knowledge. If Foucault’s analysis of power is accepted (see 2.3), then it is not a question of pitting one kind of knowledge against another, of comparing, for example, a positivist position negatively against a post-positivist one because both are modes of power-knowledge.

Emancipatory action research then, is always located within the context of evolving and dynamic socio-historic conditions. This contrasts sharply with both the positivist and the interpretivist position. For the positivist, except insofar as scientific enquiry will contribute to technological advance, the socio-historical context has little or no bearing on either the choice of a research field or the result of scientific enquiry. Within the interpretivist tradition, different social contexts play a central role in the research process but these tend to be regarded by researchers as “natural”. This means that social conditions (discrimination against women, for example) are generally accepted without a rigorous critique of prevailing conditions and with little or no analysis of social power relations. In addition, the notion of evolving and dynamic social

conditions receives scant attention and consequently, the problems of social conflict and change are not addressed. Furthermore, with its emphasis on the importance of the interpretations of individuals, debate about the determining role of historical and social conditions is also neglected. There is no sense that

Social structure, as well as being the *product* of the meanings and actions of individuals, itself *produces* particular meanings, ensures their continuing existence, and thereby limits the kind of actions that it is reasonable for individuals to perform. (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 95)

#### 4.2.4 The Role of the Researcher in Emancipatory Action Research

Given the underplaying of evolving socio-historical conditions, it follows that in neither positivism nor interpretivism does the researcher attempt to play a *significant* political or social role. While there have been attempts within both paradigms to theorise the effects of the researcher (in explanations of the observer paradox, for example) in the final analysis the researcher remains essentially *outside* the researched situation. So, although the role of the researcher is not entirely neglected it is only in the context of critical research that it comes into sharp focus. Here, the notions of self-reflexivity and critical reflection are of immediate relevance. For Menz (1989) critical self-reflection is an attitude on the part of the researcher which necessitates critical reflection on the research process. It demands an acknowledgement that researchers are an *integral* part of the social context under analysis and that research, far from being “value-free”, is shaped by the researcher’s own interests which need to be explicitly stated and substantiated.

Walker (1996) adds further explicit explanation to this concept, arguing that reflexivity implies that researchers need to engage in self-critical practice which entails the understanding and recognition of the values which underpin the processes by which they interpret the world. She argues that reflection in emancipatory action research necessitates bringing both the research *and* the researcher into critical focus and, by thus acknowledging an interest in the process, tempers claims of objectivity.

The self-understandings of researchers, however, cannot be the only source of self-reflection sufficient to interrogate and potentially undermine deeply held beliefs and assumptions. With Haber (1994), Hennessy (1993) Kenway (1995) and Luke (1995), (see 2.6), Winter (1987) and Walker (1996) argue that social science theory plays a crucial role in the shaping of self reflection. For Winter the “action” of action research cannot be simply taken for granted as in the research process it is potentially a source of interrogation of common practice. Walker illustrates the complexity of this process:

In action research the researcher is both participant in the action and inquirer into that same action. The knowledge that guides action can always be provisionally deemed to be sufficient for that course of action at that time, but it can also be deemed insufficient, in the light of the notion of “greater understanding”, which not action-but-research could possibly create. Action is enmeshed (however loosely) into a social system, whereas research is the process whereby the self-perpetuating processes of the system might be interrupted. This does not mean that theory (or research) prescribes action, rather that there is a continuous and unending relationship between theorist and social action - between self and self as Other. (1996: 32)

Within the critical, emancipatory tradition then, researchers are directly involved in social and political action. Not only do they recognise that they are an integral part of the evolving historical process but they have an explicitly stated concern for social inequality and injustice. Of crucial importance is that their research is carried out *for* and *with* rather than *on* traditionally dominated, marginalised social groups who also, unlike observed and manipulated objects, participate in and influence the research process. In addition, and in contrast to researchers working in the other two traditions, who have no explicit interest in challenging or attempting to change dominant or unjust social conditions, critical researchers are openly committed to the critique of existing conditions and in the potentially transformatory consequences of critical research. Comstock summarises the critical perspective thus:

a critical social science sees society as humanly constructed and, in turn, human nature as a collective self-construction. This emphasises the historicity of social structure, processes, and meanings and directs attention to the possible world immanent in present formations. Social science knowledge is, like all reflexive understanding of social practice, constituted by the understandings, values, and goals of particular individuals, groups, or classes. Critical social science is distinguished

by its interest in the emancipation of those groups and classes that are presently dominated. (1982: 377-378)

In sum, emancipatory action research locates itself in an evolving and necessarily dynamic socio-historical context. Its broad research interest is to uncover and critique inequality and injustice, and so any situations which involve unequal power relations, are of interest. The researcher is integrally involved in the research process as are the other participants. The implications of this are that the aims, values and interests, insofar as these are known and can be defined, must be made explicit to everyone concerned. The research should not only critique existing situations but should also include proposals for practical implementation. Ideally, any proposals for and implementation of change should emanate from the participants themselves (Labov in Wodak 1989) and certainly the results of any research should be made available both to the participants and to those in a position to implement change.

#### **4.2.5 Praxis and Emancipatory Action Research**

If action research does reflect emancipatory interest, then it will be fundamentally informed by the notion of *praxis*. Distinguished from everyday, habitual activity as informed, committed action (Carr and Kemmis 1986), the concept is most widely known in educational contexts through the work of Paulo Freire. He argues that “men’s activity is action and reflection: it is praxis . . . and as praxis it requires theory to illuminate it. Men’s activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action” (Freire 1972: 96).

For Freire, action and reflection exist in a dialectical relationship, interacting with and building on each other. *Praxis* always takes place in a socially constructed, interactive context and has as its starting point concrete, historical situations rather than hypothetical ones. It recognises that meaning, as a social construction, is constituted in and by its context and can never be absolute.

The starting point for organising the programme content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential,



concrete present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response, not just at an intellectual level, but at the level of action. (Freire 1972: 68)

It is important to note that for Freire, those involved in *praxis* are in a position to observe, judge and analyse the consequences of their action. In the context of action research, this means that through *praxis* a researcher can both act on particular understandings and commitments and use the process as a means to critically evaluate and develop those understandings:

by observing the action taken and the consequences of the action, the action researcher deliberately arranges things so that these understandings and commitments can be critically examined . . . the action researcher deliberately analyzes the correspondences and non-correspondences between understandings, practices and the structure of educational situations, and searches for contradictions within and between them . . . action research is a deliberate process for emancipating practitioners from the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology. (Carr & Kemmis 1986: 192)

In the context of this particular study, the process of uncovering naturalised university practice is of central concern.

#### **4.2.6 Understanding “Emancipation”, “Participation” and “Empowerment” in Diverse Social Contexts**

Clearly, the recurrent themes which dominate literature on action research are “emancipation”, “participation” and “empowerment”. These concepts, however, should be used with considerable caution. Hursh warns against

the superficial attempt to situate action research within a critical theoretical context by emphasising emancipatory or liberatory discourses detached from a more complex and contradictory historical, philosophical, and political examination of education and schooling. (1995: 62)

He argues that an emancipatory approach to education which foregrounds notions of emancipation and democracy must recognise that the context is one of limited and contradictory discourses, which reflect ongoing struggles around the nature of education and society. The term “emancipation”, for example, cannot be viewed as having a fixed and unchanging meaning. Originally used to mean freedom from class domination, it is now used more generally to denote a process of becoming “free” and to mark the emergence of previously marginalised groups asserting their identity (Walker 1996). The concept itself, however, is not inherently critical if power relations themselves are not changed. We need then, to speak of “emancipations” and to consider each form in its specific historical context. This entails the critique of “emancipation” as it was defined within the project of modernity. As Walker points out

What the notion of diversity, and multiple “emancipations” offers is an acknowledgement of the unevenness in social networks . . . It . . . follows that there is no truth about emancipatory action research outside or prior to its social and historical context and hence it is always open to challenge and argument by the reader. Otherwise we all run the risk of a “politically correct” view which reduces a complex term like emancipation to a unitary meaning which demands conformity and consensus rather than dissent, contradiction and ambiguity. (1996: 29-30)

The notion of participation needs similar interrogation as it could simply refer to integration into an already existing, possibly exploitative system with no possibility of a shift in power relations. It is therefore important to consider what participation may exclude as the issue is not simply whether or not certain groups participate but whether participants have the means to define the parameters and nature of their participation. The idea of multiple “participations” is also pertinent here. Whether or not a process can justifiably be deemed participatory will be dependent on the precise, local context which implies that what may be “participation” in one context, may well not be in another.

The meaning of “empowerment” should also be considered in terms of its precise context. It can carry extremely conservative implications, denoting individualistic, politically “neutral” upward mobility through a social system via adaptation and conformity to established social conventions. It does not, therefore, necessarily imply a critical, politicised, consciousness; while emancipation often implies empowerment, not every form of empowerment is emancipatory.

The difficulty of distinguishing upward mobility from emancipatory empowerment, especially in a post-apartheid society like South Africa, highlights the limitations of an uncritical adoption of the terminology of emancipatory action research. Central terminology, and therefore the research method itself, has explanatory potential but only as long as its limitations are recognised and acknowledged and only as long as it is carefully and fully explained within specific social and educational contexts. In addition, the possibility that “emancipation” is a Western enlightenment term which does not fully meet the ideals of those with whom the research is done, needs to be acknowledged. This admission extends the notion of plurality even further by implying that even in a very specific context, the goal of “emancipation” could be variously interpreted.

#### **4.2.7 This Study as Emancipatory Action Research**

In the conceptualisation and implementation of this programme, each feature of emancipatory action research was carefully considered and in each case there was an attempt to ensure that its requirements were met. For example, it was designed within a specific educational context with the improvement of pedagogical practice and the involvement of and collaboration with all participants seen as central concerns. In addition, unequal power relations within the university context were a key consideration. Furthermore, the purpose of the research and the interests of the researcher, most especially in Cycle Two, were made as explicit as possible. Whether this research met the criteria sufficiently to be labelled “emancipatory” as this is defined in the literature, will emerge in Chapters Five and Six (see especially 6.5.4).

### **4.3 Action Research in a University Context**

#### **4.3.1 The Institutional Context**

In 1984, as part of the broader programme of intervention initiated by and developed within South Africa’s recently “open” (but historically white) universities (see 1.2), a first year credit-bearing course in academic literacy, *Learning, Language and Logic* was introduced on the

Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal. This course, which was the first of its kind in South Africa, is one strand of the initiative to redress some of the educational impoverishment and inequity experienced by black students living under the apartheid regime.

The relationship between different groups and individuals involved in this initiative is, however, complex and at times conflictual. People from different spheres of the university are positioned and position themselves differently in relation to the precise aim of the course and its role in the university as a whole. While in some respects, the team of second language teachers responsible for the development and implementation of *Learning, Language and Logic* would position themselves **within** the broad university academic development project, they also stand in a conflictual relationship with some constructions of it. For example, some university administrators involved in broad policy and planning processes and many members of the academic staff, view the course as being primarily aimed to improve the grammatical proficiency of second language students and to equip them with the necessary academic skills required for university success. We agree that one of the broad aims of the course is to identify and respond to the academic and communicative needs of second (and sometimes third) language speakers on the campus with a view to facilitating the development of their academic competence and, crucially, to provide them with *access* to dominant university discourses. Inevitably then, a large portion of our task is to create a context in which students can acquire the necessary academic literacy, that they have sufficient time to practise and reflect on academic processes and skills, particularly reading and writing, needed for success at university.

It should be noted that our aim is not to facilitate specific disciplinary requirements which focus on distinctive methodological and epistemological practices (Ballard and Clanchy 1988; Chiseri-Strater 1991) but rather to focus on broader enquiry strategies and tasks (Spack 1988), to assist students to acquire what Dison and Rule have termed “institutional competence” (1995:428).<sup>26</sup> This includes a broad range of skills and activities from academic essay writing to familiarisation with the library and, on referral, computer literacy. In this, we are in line with some other English

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26. See also Berkenkotter and Huckin’s (1995) distinction between “pedagogical” and disciplinary genres and Johns’ (1995) distinction between “classroom” and “authentic” genres.

for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the country. Kapp, for example, defines EAP offered at the University of Cape Town as a course which

attempts to provide students with a metalanguage about academia and its discourse, a metalanguage which serves as a tool with which to decode and discuss the concept of transition to the new learning environment. Our tasks attempt to demystify and explain the processes students encounter in the mainstream. (1994: 120)

For us, however, the aim of the course is by no means confined to the acquisition or development of academic skills. It is equally important that students develop an interrogative relationship with the university as an educational institution, that the academic literacy is *critical* in that they become aware of the power relationships which shape the university and that they increase their confidence to communicate confidently and competently in all spheres of university life (see 6.2).

In order to create a context from which students can do this, we need to understand and be constantly aware of the wider social relations in which the university and this particular course are located. Although it is readily acknowledged that a single curriculum cannot expect to address the complexities of the broader socio-political issues fully or even adequately, it is precisely those conditions in which our thinking is embedded and which provide the context for the ongoing development of the curriculum.

A comment from a black female student in response to one of her early university experiences highlights several aspects of this context and provides some indication of the number of factors which intermesh, at times conflictually, to contribute to the experience of the university environment. This student enrolled for *Learning, Language and Logic* in 1989. During the first quarter, one group of students was asked to investigate any aspect of the university environment they chose. They decided to interview Deans of Faculties or other senior members of the administration about the university's admission policy, most especially as it pertained to black students. The purpose of this activity was to develop the linguistic and personal confidence and competence of these new students by creating what Brice Heath and Branscombe have termed "crises in communication" (1985: 31), contexts in which they were involved in relatively high risk situations, which would challenge them to use all the linguistic, sociolinguistic and strategic

resources<sup>27</sup> at their disposal. It was also hoped they would experience, as interviewers, albeit in this rather unusual context, a position where they were potentially in control of some of the encounter.

High risk communicative tasks, however, can have counter-productive and demoralising effects, and adequate initial preparation was an essential part of the process. Students worked in groups of two or three and spent considerable time carefully defining their purpose, making the necessary appointments (itself a completely new experience), learning about appropriate formats for later written and oral presentation and role-playing potentially difficult situations. They

discussed various interviewing strategies and attempted to anticipate potential obstacles to what, in any event, was an undeniably daunting task. Once the interviews had been completed, they were required to present their findings individually as formal written discourse and then to pool information by reporting back orally to the rest of the class.

The final section of the written report consisted of a personal evaluation of and response to the interviewing experience. The student mentioned above had this to say:

What I learnt from the interview was that things didn't occur as I expected them. I was so tensed since it was the first time that I had to interview a white man. What I discovered was that he appeared to be a kind somebody. While I was fighting with my monitor<sup>28</sup> trying to construct sentences for introducing ourselves, the man asked

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27. Canale and Swain (1979) and Canale (1983) argue that communicative competence includes four broad areas of knowledge - grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic. Grammatical competence refers to familiarity with the formal rules of the language which includes vocabulary, word formation and syntactic structure. Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts while discourse competence is the capacity to combine sentences to form coherent and cohesive spoken or written text. Strategic competence (for example, the use of gesture or of the first language) is the measures adopted by learners either to improve communication or to compensate for its failure. It should be acknowledged that Canale and Swain do not make claims about **how** these components interact but simply identify **what** they consider to be the minimum requirements for communicative competence. It should also be noted that they adopt an uncritical view of the notion of appropriacy. (cf Fairclough 1992b).
28. Krashen (1982), unlike many other theorists (for example, Ellis 1985; 1990) distinguishes between language acquisition and language learning. *Acquisition*, he argues, is a subconscious process similar to the development of competence in the first language. *Learning*, on the other hand, refers to the conscious knowledge of a second language when the learner is aware of some of the formal

if we would like to have a cup of coffee. I was surprised by the question to the extent that I hardly trusted my ears that he really meant it. I responded with yes but still felt hesitation so I said no. He himself provided me with coffee. Still asking myself why he was lowering himself like that, the man bumpered us with answers of the unasked questions. He talked a non-stop speech of about one and a half hours. By the time he stopped, he expected questions from us. I was amazed and it was difficult to know which questions were answered and which were not . . . Being bewildered, I asked fumbling questions just to console myself that I can ask a question. Still the man responded to them nicely.

To me the interview was absolutely wonderful. It changed my conclusions about the whites whom I regard as superior. I was brought to the conclusion that some are just like myself, willing to help and to socialise.

As a young black woman, this student had to manage and to some extent overcome a wide range of her life experiences which interacted to constitute her “tensed” and “bewildered” response to the situation. Firstly, the racial divisions and stereotypes which characterise this country are clearly evident. Secondly, and crucially, interacting with the racial dimension, are the traditional and unequal gender relations, which are so stringently defined within many black communities (Ramphele and Boonzaier 1988). The fact that she was both black **and** female, in addition to being a young first year, second language student interacting with a much older male, positioned her in a specific and complex way and served to make her task all the more taxing.

Her responses themselves give some evidence of this complexity. Most interesting here, are the contradictions that permeate her discourse. Two broad and apparently conflicting strands of the experience clearly emerge. On the one hand, she discovered that, contrary to her “tensed”, socialised fear about interviewing a white male and to other expectations, the “white man . . . appeared to be a kind somebody” who she was amazed to find “lowering” himself to make coffee for her and who was prepared to respond “nicely” to her “fumbling” questions. The very fact that she describes him as “lowering” himself signals her contradictory subject positions, casting doubt

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grammatical rules and is able to recall and discuss them. Conscious reference to the rules of a language is the basis of his Monitor Hypothesis in which he claims that acquisition and learning processes are used in quite distinct ways and the only function of learning is as monitor or editor. For Krashen the learning process becomes operative only when it is necessary to make changes to the form of an utterance, after it has been produced by the acquired system. This can happen before or after we speak or write (1982). This student had been involved in tutorial discussions about this claim, hence her reference to “fighting with my monitor”.

on whether he *should* in fact have done so. Importantly, however, like her, he was also “willing to help and to socialise” and his friendly, informal manner was certainly an unexpected aspect of the experience which, at this level, was a pleasant realisation for her.

On the other hand, and in sharp contrast to the positive aspects of her experience, are the considerable confusion, the element of mistrust and lack of control of the interview that emerge in her discourse. The fact that “things”, as she says, “did not occur as I had expected them”, served to disempower her in this context. If one observes, with Shipman, that “interviews not only depend on the quality of the questions asked, but on the awareness of, and control over, the interaction involved” (1973: 84), and accepts Cannell and Kahn’s definition of an interview as “a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information” (in Cohen and Manion 1980: 291) or Fairclough’s view that it is the interviewer who retains the “interactional control” (1992c: 234), then it is evident that she was not engaged in an interview at all. No amount of forethought and anticipation could have prepared her for being “bumpered . . . with the answers to the unasked questions”; and few definitions of an interview as a specific genre would concede that it could consist of “a non-stop speech of about one and a half hours”, most particularly before any questions had been asked. At different points during the interview she describes herself as “fighting with her monitor”, feeling “bewildered” and, in the end, being able to ask only “fumbling questions” in order to “console” herself that she was capable of asking a question at all.

The positive and pivotal aspects of this encounter appear to be based on an unexpected, courteous and informal welcome from a white male and his making her a cup of coffee. There is no evidence that she had, at any level, control of the situation nor the means, after setting up the meeting, to take even a little of the initiative.

If this interaction is viewed from the point of view of the different discourses intersecting within it, then the conflicting responses of this student are more readily explicable. She is strongly constituted in and by the primary discourse (Gee 1996) of her specific social and family context, the discourse that locates her as a passive black woman in the context of her own society and which positions her as an inferior black person in the broader context of apartheid South Africa.



Within the university she still constitutes herself in terms of this discourse but she is now also located within secondary discourses which are unfamiliar and result in her discomfort. The warm response of the Dean can be seen as part of a hybrid discourse, one which combines a “public relations” discourse type, an official university interview and the more personal “fatherly” responses. This range of intertextually related discourses conflicts and so too do the student’s subjectivities as she responds to the interview.

What is also of note here are the various ways in which this student was constructed and positioned in the situation - by the Dean, by the institution and, indeed, by herself. The competing interpretations of the encounter (the difference between her construction of meaning and mine) especially in the light of the earlier discussion of “otherness” (Ellsworth 1989; Weiler 1991) is also significant. The difference between her subjectivities, as a black, first year, female, second language student and mine as a white, female, feminist academic are clearly evident and, in any further discussion, the creation of a forum in which these differences could be constructively articulated would be essential. The plurality of meaning needs to be incorporated into any discussion of the event. What *is* crucial is that her feelings and experience should be seriously acknowledged (Ellsworth 1989; Weiler 1991) and not undermined by what may be constructed as the more “experienced” or “academic” perception. Her overriding impression, at this time in her life, is extremely positive. While it should be noted that this encounter is mediated by the fact that it was a *Learning, Language and Logic* project report, she found that she *could* interact with him and that she could, despite her confusion, ask some of the necessary questions. The fact that, for her, “the interview was absolutely wonderful” and that “it changed [her] conclusions about whites” indicates that she felt that she had experienced important perceptual shifts and these are likely to have increased her confidence in other, later encounters. The question of what constitutes an “empowering” experience is interesting in this context. If the encounter is defined within the terms of traditional emancipatory action research in which empowerment should entail significant shifts in power relations, then it fails to meet the necessary criteria. If, however, the contextual features of the encounter are fully accounted for, then it denotes significant “empowering” potential. While it cannot be claimed that the Dean’s social and institutional power shifted in any way, the same is not true for the student. The event in itself might seem to be of little consequence but it is the context here that is the key to

interpreting the nature of the experience. To manage an encounter of this nature *in a South African university in 1989*, was a major political and social achievement for her: in that sense it was empowering and represents the possibility of similar experiences in the future.

The situation described above is a single example of the multifaceted nature of the experiences facing students, particularly black students, coming to the university for the first time. It has been discussed here, not as a reflection of the experiences of all students, nor because it captures the total complexity of this one encounter. It does, however, help to identify several of the broad contextual considerations (these include the socio-political realities of South Africa as well as the specific demands of the university) in which *Learning, Language and Logic* is being developed and serves to reaffirm the importance of conceptualising any curriculum clearly within its precise historical conditions.

### **4.3.2 The Pedagogical Context**

Before turning to a discussion of the critical language programme itself, a little more detail about *Learning, Language and Logic* is necessary, not from the perspective of its content but in terms of its pedagogical principles and implications. The course was initially offered by several departments, each taking responsibility for one of five broad aspects. These were general learning skills, communication strategies, reading, writing and logic. This somewhat arbitrary separation of the different components was initially based on logistical and staffing constraints rather than pedagogical considerations but, inevitably, the limitations, difficulties and contradictions that arose as a result were of a fundamentally pedagogical nature. A detailed analysis of these problems is superfluous here, but it is important to highlight the changes and developments that have occurred in response to them.

During the past few years, there has been an increasingly intensive and ongoing process of consultation and collaboration which has involved weekly curriculum development meetings which provide tutors with the opportunity for constant reflection, evaluation and modification. This process is clearly evidenced by the ongoing articulation of the underpinning principles of

the course and the substantial changes made to the curriculum each year. One change, for example, has been that the initial overlap and repetition has been eliminated and the course has become much more coherent. Reading and writing processes, for example, are now defined and dealt with as integrally related; there is a far greater emphasis on process rather than on the learning of discrete skills and, in addition, a closer relationship between the communication theory (which forms the core content of the course) and its practical implications for academic literacy has been developed. The framework of the curriculum has also been expanded: having begun as a skills-based course (though always within the context sketched above), *Learning, Language and Logic* now includes the wider issues of student and staff positioning on the university campus and has begun to develop ways in which the power relationships in the institution can be better understood. Crucially, this has led to even more explicit discussion and teaching about dominant discourses, both in and outside of the university and about questions of access in both educational institutions and in the broader social community. In other words, we have moved to a much more fully developed idea of *critical* literacy and its implications for students in the South African context (Clark and Ivanič 1997; Morgan 1997; Street 1995; see also 2.7.2).

One of the key tensions which has emerged in the course during recent years, and one which is frequently referred to by tutors, is the need for students to develop their confidence and competence in a wide range of academic skills on the one hand, while at the same time analysing and understanding the more subtle and intricate dynamics of the institution, particularly in terms of its power relations (see 6.2.2). The *Learning, Language and Logic* tutors would concur with Boomer, who claims that we need to be looking, not only at what skills are being acquired or at what performance achieved but also at “what values, attitudes and transformative strategies are being inculcated” (1989: 4). Clark and Ivanič’s (1997) claim that writing should be viewed not simply as a physical or linguistic process but as a political and social act is also pertinent here as is Delpit’s insistence that the rules of what she terms the “culture of power” should be *explicitly* taught, that what is normally a “silenced dialogue” (1988: 282) should be openly debated with learners, especially those from traditionally marginalised contexts (see also 2.7.2.) Given extreme time constraints, however, the pressure to improve academic and communicative skills often appears to conflict with the necessity to develop a critical and interrogative

relationship with the university as an educational institution. There seems scarcely time to begin to unravel the multiple and complex dynamics which constitute an academic, social and political environment, an environment which is always unfamiliar to new students and, for many, extremely alienating.<sup>29</sup> It should be remembered, however, that academic and communicative skills are related to critical interrogatory processes - they are not discrete “sets” of skills and some of the former are needed to understand the latter which in turn enhance academic skills.

This situation is further complicated by the claim that teachers may, consciously or unconsciously, contribute to and exacerbate difficulties students experience. Norton Peirce, for example, claims that there is often an emphasis on appropriacy at the expense of the development of a critical approach. She argues that

if we teach English in a way that promotes a student’s uncritical integration into a society, students will lack the tools to question the predetermined roles established for them by that society. Conversely, if we teach our students that appropriate usage, although useful to acquire, is nevertheless historically and materially constructed to support the interests of a dominant group within a given society, we can open up possibilities for our students in terms of the way in which they perceive themselves, their role in society, and the possibilities for change and growth in their society. (1989: 407)

This statement can be challenged from at least three perspectives. Firstly, Norton Peirce distinguishes too simplistically between criticality and appropriacy, setting one notion against the other discretely without acknowledging the complexity of the relationship between the two. The two processes, however, are by no means mutually exclusive. For example, there are occasions when the avoidance of critical interrogation is in the best interests of the student, when an “appropriate” course of action might be to avoid any form of confrontation. As Fairclough

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29. Alienation in this context is not used as it is in Marx’s Theory of Alienation (Larrain 1979; Eagleton 1991) but in its more colloquial sense. It refers to the negative experiences of first year students described by Hart (1987). His research reveals several factors which contribute to feelings of isolation and alienation in the university environment. These include overt racism in many sectors of the university, unrealistic expectations on the part of some students coupled with a lack of awareness of their underpreparedness, feelings of social and academic inadequacy and expectations of failure on the part of others and differences in interactional style. For Hart “the picture that emerges . . . is one where the alienating experience of university, for a significant number of Black students, results in a sense of hopelessness because they feel that there is little that can be done about their situation” (1987: 28).

(1992b and c; 1995a) and Janks and Ivanič (1992) point out, it is extremely important that if students are going to challenge dominant conventions in powerful institutions, they do so fully informed of the possible risks and costs of such behaviour. This implies that there may well be times when students choose to avoid challenge. For the purposes of this argument, however, Norton Peirce's warning about the possible facilitation of students' uncritical integration into the university, which can be encouraged by an over-reliance on traditional and "appropriate" academic and social convention (Fairclough 1992b), should be seriously regarded.

Secondly, and this should be read in the context of the first criticism, many teachers, particularly academics, would take exception to the implication that they encourage "uncritical integration" of any description in students and insist that the facilitation of critical faculties is one of the fundamental tenets of their educational endeavour. Many nevertheless demand that their students unquestioningly follow a range of academic conventions without acknowledging that this could constitute an uncritical integration into the academic discourse community.

When Norton-Peirce's statement is read within the particular educational context from which many of our students have come, it retains some cautionary value. For example, although a black student might articulate oppositional stances to the education system in general, there is also the possibility that, within the university context, particularly during the first year, s/he may adopt the passive and unquestioning stance encouraged so strongly in black schools. The central point here is that when rote learning in overcrowded conditions under the direction of under-resourced teachers is commonplace, students' adoption of a subject position which entails the absence of critical interpretation is unsurprising and the need for teachers to consciously and explicitly encourage critical responses becomes more acute. It should be noted, however, that students' educational experiences are not homogeneous and that it is possible, even for the same student, to adopt contradictory subject positions (see 6.5.3).

Thirdly, and particularly in the light of the critique of the emancipatory pedagogy discussed in Chapter Two, Norton Peirce, by postulating the "possibilities for change and growth in . . . society", is in danger of formulating claims which are too decontextualised and general to be of any real value. This study, although it takes account of broad social conditions, is located in one

particular university context and all discussion of possibilities for changed perceptions or action should be interpreted within this specific, relatively narrowly defined institutional context.

#### 4.4 The Aim of this Research

This research programme is particularly concerned with incoming black students and their responses to university discourses, particularly during the first year. It is framed by the social and institutional context sketched in Chapter One, and has been more fully developed within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapters Two and Three. Crucial here are the arguments presented around the notions of difference and diversity (see 2.2 and 2.4) and the centrality of the provision of educational access and the explicit pedagogy that that entails (see especially 2.7 and 4.3.2). From a linguistic perspective, it is centrally concerned with the social nature of language (see 3.3), the poststructuralist debate about multiple subjectivity (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2), the relationship between language and ideology (see 3.3.3), the acquisition of discourse (see 3.3.4.1), CDA and, closely linked to this, CLA as an approach to the teaching of language (see 3.4.2 and 3.5.3).

The primary purpose of the study is to facilitate in students the development of a broad, interrogative and critical understanding of the university as it is defined in the South African context. This has been done using CLA as an approach to language teaching and in the context of *Learning, Language and Logic*.<sup>30</sup> Its intention is to initiate a collaborative process during which all participants have an opportunity to reflect on and better comprehend a range of texts which form part of the discourses of the University of Natal. Using action research as a method and critical language study as a methodological tool, it is hoped that students will begin to interpret and analyse the various ways in which they (and others) are positioned in this university context. Ideally, with growing self-reflection and understanding, students will interact with university texts more actively and critically and, when appropriate, may begin to resist some of

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30. The relationship between the Critical Language Study programme and other aspects of the course during the first eight weeks, is represented in Table 2 in 6.2.

the dominant discourses (Fairclough 1992b and c; Janks and Ivanič 1992) and become aware of the possibility of the construction of a “counter-discourse” (Pecheux 1975; Terdiman 1985).

It is not my intention in this study to produce generalisable results applicable to all university contexts nor to make predictions about students’ experience or action. This is an exploration of the ways in which power relations are encoded in a range of texts in a specific academic context and of students’ responses to these. All findings, therefore, need to be analysed and interpreted within this framework. At the same time it is hoped that the results of the research may have some value in other university contexts and will result in a deeper understanding of black students’ experiences of a historically white university. Most particularly, it is hoped that those involved in the production of text, will become more alert to the often unconscious assumptions which inform them.

## Chapter Five

### First Research Intervention: Cycle One

#### 5.1 Introduction

In Carr and Kemmis' definition of educational action research, Lewin's interrelated spirals (of planning, acting or implementation, observing, in some cases analysing and reflecting), are preserved but, in addition, the notion of what they term *strategic action*, in relation to social practices, is foregrounded. They cite (with minor modification) the definition of educational action research which emerged from the National Invitational Seminar on Action Research in Deakin, Australia:

educational action research is a term used to describe a family of activities in curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programmes, and systems planning and policy development. These activities have in common the identification of strategies of planned action which are *implemented* and systematically submitted to *observation, reflection* and *change*. (1986: 164-165)

This particular study consists of two action research cycles, each of which needs to be analysed and evaluated in terms of the above definition and in the light of the discussion on action research above (see 4.2). The emphasis, in the first instance, is on the development, improvement and implementation of the curriculum of *Learning, Language and Logic*. More broadly, it is also concerned with the possible reformulation of some university practices as articulated through various discourses.



## 5.2 The Plan

### 5.2.1 Overview and Purpose of the First Cycle

The first cycle, or pilot project (see 5.4.4.2) consisted of six tutorials, which required discussion and written responses to text, a two hour feedback session with members of the university administration and the Director of the Language and Reading Centre and, as a result of this, the re-writing of one of the texts (see Table 1).<sup>31</sup>

**Table 1: Programme for Cycle One**

JULY VACATION						
Week	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6
19	What's in a text? Intercultural communication and frames of reference: discussion and exercises		<b>Introduction to three university texts</b>	<b>Small group discussion: response to university texts: the admission form, complaints procedures, reading course information</b> <i>Appendices A &amp; B</i>		
20	Problem solving tutorial	Frames of reference: discussion & exercises	<b>Individual writing task: detailed response to one or two texts.</b> <i>Appendices A &amp; B</i>		<b>Feedback to students on corporate responses</b>	
21	<b>Submission of student responses to texts A &amp; B to representatives of the university administration.</b> <b>Submission of student responses to text C(i) to the Director of the Reading and Language Centre.</b> <i>Appendix B</i>					
22	<b>Two hour question and answer session with Mr Bill Humphries and Mr Bernard Emmerich from the university administration and Mr Arie Blacquiere of the Reading and Language Centre. Video-recorded.</b>					
23	<b>Reworked reading text given to students. Discussion about the different constructions and their effects.</b>					

31. The items indicated in bold print on this table constitute Cycle 1.

It should be noted that these tutorials were held at the beginning of the second semester as part of discussion of the effect that differing frames of reference, or what Fairclough calls “members’ resources” (1989: 11) have on communication. Students, therefore, had had six months of experience in the university environment and, in the course *Learning, Language and Logic*, they had been exposed to a range of topics within communication theory. These included

- what constitutes “effective communication”
- communication as “the negotiation of meaning”, most especially in learning contexts,
- “barriers” to communication
- the rationale for and value of small group learning and
- the management of conflict in small groups.

Seventy-two first year students, seventy of whom spoke Zulu as their mother tongue<sup>32</sup>, attended the tutorials, whose immediate purpose was to elicit ideas about one of three university texts. Working on the assumption that many first year university students have difficulty assimilating and processing the mass of text confronting them, most especially before they enter the university, they were asked to consider whether or not the texts constituted “effective communication” and to do this from two perspectives, first with regard to linguistic difficulty and second in terms of any content which they perceived to be ideologically unacceptable (see Appendix A). Other than these broad instructions, however, they were given no further guidance about the focus of their responses. The relatively unstructured nature of the task was deliberate and aimed at providing students with the maximum opportunity to identify problem areas for themselves. They were each provided with a copy of the University Application Form, a document entitled *Procedures in Relation to Suggestions, Criticisms and Complaints Concerning Academic Course Content and Teaching* and an information/advertising sheet headed HOW ARE YOU GOING TO COPE WITH YOUR READING LOAD? (see Appendix B, Texts A(i), B, and C(i)).

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32. There was also an Italian and an Afrikaans speaker in the group.

The texts, which I had selected, were intended to provide a range of topics, text types and interest levels. The Admission Form, for example, is one of the first university texts encountered by prospective students and is likely to play some part in their initial conceptualisation of the institution. As a particular type of institutional form, it was also likely that students may not have encountered a similar text before. For both reasons, therefore, it was important to try and assess student reaction to it. The *Criticisms and Complaints* text was selected, first to alert students to the relevant complaints procedures should anyone wish to utilise them, and second because it appeared to me to be somewhat inaccessible both in terms of linguistic formulations and general appearance and layout. The reading text can be viewed largely as a university advertisement (but see 5.4.2.3 and 6.4.5) which encourages students to utilise a service specifically designed for their potential needs. This was chosen to try to gauge student reaction to services of this kind, particularly with regard to the ways in which they are positioned in the text.

### 5.2.2 Central Research Questions

The central research questions underpinning the planning stage which formed the basis for this cycle were:

1. How do first year, second language students respond to university texts received at the beginning of the year?<sup>33</sup>
2. How do students' responses to texts, as mediated by their tutors, affect the understanding of their early experiences of institutional discourse and, by extension, their initial experience of the university as an educational institution?

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33. The package of texts received by students before they enter the university, which is referred to as *The January Mail* in cycle two, consists of numerous and diverse documents. In addition to the admission form and information about degree structures and registration procedures, it includes the university code of conduct, faculty handbooks, information about residences, student government and a range of services, pre-university courses and societies.

3. How should improved understanding of student responses and experiences impact on the development of curricula and facilitate improved teaching practice?
4. How can student responses precipitate shifts in the construction of university discourse?

### **5.3 Implementation**

The seventy-two students in the class in 1989 were divided into six groups. For the first three tutorials, they worked in groups of two or three, discussing their reactions to all three texts. Then, during the next three tutorials, they worked individually on written responses to one text (and in a few cases two texts) of their choice. This was followed by a verbal report to the rest of the class and general concluding discussion. Tutors collated their group's comments which I then incorporated into a collective class response. This was sent, in the case of Texts A and B, to a representative of the university administration, and in the case of Text C(i), to its writer. Both recipients agreed to attend a discussion during which various suggestions and criticisms could be debated with the students. In the case of the reading text in particular, significant changes were made as a result of student reaction and the text was completely rewritten. Both versions of it were then incorporated into the second cycle of tutorials for further comment and reaction.

### **5.4 Observation**

#### **5.4.1 Introduction**

The collation and analysis of this data needs to be prefaced by three general points. Firstly, each of the texts discussed below will be situationally positioned within university discourses using the conceptual framework (in terms of field, tenor and mode) provided by Halliday (1985). It should be noted, however, that here this is simply for ease of reference and that although students

may refer to aspects of the texts that relate to these three dimensions (and to their linguistic realisations) it was not considered necessary or beneficial to make them explicit to students.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, although there is considerable overlap between broad responses to the different texts, the categories under which they have been individually discussed vary, both in terms of their precise formulation and their sequencing. Both aspects have, as far as possible, emerged from the student responses (as opposed to fitting responses into pre-defined categories) and their presentation here is an attempt to articulate as accurately as possible the particular emphasis and perceptions relating to each text.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the first cycle is of far less importance than Cycle Two which forms the basis of this study. The reflection on and analysis of data generated from this cycle is included here because it is valuable for providing the basis on which Cycle Two was conceptualised, planned and implemented. The data will be briefly discussed with these considerations in mind. It also serves as a point of contrast with some aspects of Cycle Two (see 6.1).

## **5.4.2 Data Analysis**

### **5.4.2.1 Student Responses to Text A: Application for Admission to Study in 1989**

#### **Introduction**

The field of discourse of this text (see Appendix B, Text A(i)) is the systematic regulation of new applicants to the university and the classification of a range of personal information pertaining to each applicant, including biographical details, educational background, experience and financial position. Its tenor consists of “the institution”, collectively addressing individual applicants using a linguistic style and general format typical of what can be termed an “official

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34. Later, during Cycle Two there was explicit discussion of Halliday’s categories.

form” genre. Its mode is written and formulaic and it has status as a non-verbal transaction which will become part of the official university records.

## General Responses

The responses of the thirty students who wrote about this text provide an extremely diverse range of comments regarding the Admission Form.<sup>35</sup> Two of them provide a useful point of departure:

Using the booklet<sup>36</sup> one gets with the application is like throwing a child which cannot swim into the deep end of a swimming pool because that booklet is very vague in the instructions it gives one and so filling out the form is confusing (C1/S44)<sup>37</sup>.

This form is an effective communication in that throughout it states clearly what is needed from the applicant.<sup>38</sup> (C1/S23).

These two starkly opposed responses to the admission form provide some indication of the range of student reaction to it. Below is an attempt to reconstruct both positive and negative views, first from an ideological point of view, which, in the case of this text, received most attention and second from a linguistic perspective. Here, considerations of general layout and “visual” accessibility of the text have been included. While individual responses may be mentioned for illustrative purposes, the aim here is to try and identify trends in student perception rather than to focus on single responses.

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35. It should be noted that, although seventy-two students participated in this cycle, they were only required to write about one (and at the most two) of the three texts (see 5.3). This explains both the relatively small number of respondents to the individual texts and also, because some students wrote about two texts, it explains why the number of responses does not add up to seventy-two.

36. This refers to an accompanying booklet which provides guidance and additional information about the correct procedures for filling in the form.

37. The student data has been categorised according to the cycle in which it was collected and then in terms of the number allocated to the student.

38. All quotations from student responses (here and in Chapters Six and Seven) have been left unedited and, in the case of grammatical inaccuracy, uncorrected.

## Political and Ideological Perceptions

Students were specifically asked to comment about the acceptability of the documents at the level of content. The majority of responses in this area (twelve students) revolved around what was perceived to be the racist and divisive nature of some of the information required by the form. Questions pertaining to population group drew the sharpest comment. The request for an indication of membership of a race group was regarded as particularly divisive and aroused the suspicion that the university was admitting students on the basis of race. One student was unequivocal about this:

I don't really think that kind of information is required for statistical purposes. It serves also the purpose of limiting the number of Black students to be admitted. If this were not the case, I think such information could be taken into account when students were already admitted. (C1/S15)

Six students linked this to the university's practical commitment to its stated policy of non-racialism and affirmative action claiming that the inclusion of this question maintains and perpetuates apartheid structures. This comment is typical:

If the university rejects apartheid and if it is an equal opportunities affirmative action university, it should not issue the documents exposing . . . apartheid and tribalism and racial segregation which are in contrast with democracy. (C1/S10)

Other questions which generated criticism and suspicion and were regarded by some as "alienating" and by others as "offensive and hurtful", were those pertaining to students' home language, the completion of military service,<sup>39</sup> the educational examining body, the number of matriculation points obtained and the education of the students' parents.

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39. Under the apartheid government, national service, which was undertaken by whites only, was viewed by many blacks as an integral part of the apartheid regime which aimed to maintain and perpetuate apartheid philosophy. Hence the resistance from black students to this part of the form.

## **Linguistic Aspects**

Of the thirty students who chose to write about this form, eight indicated that linguistically, they had experienced little difficulty. They found the language clear and accessible and the form relatively straightforward to complete though three students suggested that the instructions on page eleven be placed on the inside front cover because “one must have direction before starting on the journey” (C1/S9). In conjunction with linguistic clarity, the layout and the division of the form into sections were also cited as positive features which had assisted in its successful completion.

For others, however, problems arose with the university-specific terminology with fourteen students indicating uncertainty and confusion about various terms. Seven students were unclear, for example, about the meaning of words like “Faculty”, “post-graduate”, “full exemption” and “non-degree purposes”, while three did not know what the abbreviations “S”, “HG”, and “O” stood for. Three students requested that the difference between “Miss” and “Ms” be explained and five drew attention to the use of the term “maiden name”. As one person commented

Frames of reference are not the same, there is a need for second language speakers level of understanding to be taken into consideration. In Section 3 words like “maiden name”, I for one had a problem about it. I could not articulate the word because I had no frame of reference about the word (C1/S51).

There were six requests for the definition of unfamiliar terms and for illustrative examples.

### **5.4.2.2 Student Response to Text B: Procedures in Relation to Suggestions, Criticisms and Complaints Concerning Academic Course Content or Teaching**

#### **Introduction**

The field of discourse of the text (see Appendix B, Text B) is the provision of information regarding a particular university complaints procedure. Again, the tenor may be defined as the



“institution” addressing individual complainants or, alternatively, groups of students who share a complaint. It is written to be circulated and kept by students for their future use. The style is similar to much legal discourse and it is therefore difficult to access in parts.

Twenty-three students responded to this document and their comments ranged from general responses to the text as a whole to discussion around specific procedures recommended in it. Nine students took an extremely critical position, pointing out internal inconsistencies within the text and between the text and their own experience. Twelve focused on problems around questions of general relevance, authorship and purpose. Eleven also considered the appearance, format and status of the text and, often closely related to this, discussed the language and terminology contained in it.

### **General Responses**

Eleven students included broad statements about the text as a whole in their reports. In general these were positive, though many modified and conditioned their responses with criticisms and suggestions for changes or additions to existing procedures. Students felt that it was important that such a text be made available to students, that it makes first years aware of the correct procedures and that it gives students “the liberty to bring up issues around the teaching methods and the right to criticize constructively” (C1/2).

One student concluded that the text provides “quite reasonable guidelines” and “sounds impressive” but went on to highlight potential problems. He asked

Can these structures minimise or ensure that the problems do not take place at all? To me it seems that these structures are only designed to solve rather than prevent problems . . . which would have been possibly avoided if the students were made to take part in the decision making and the running of the University in general. (C1/S11)

In terms of the possibilities for student action, one student noted “a lot of stress on individual action” (C1/31), while others perceived a contradiction in the text, a potential clash between individual and collective action (see Appendix B, Text B: 1.2 cf 1.7)

Six students highlighted serious differences between assurances given in the text and their own experience. This response serves as an illustrative example:

I will quote a response of a lecturer who was asked by a student to slow down because he was too fast. He answered: “Who has experience in lecturing? Who has been doing this for more than twenty years? Who is an expert in this field? Who will set your exam questions? So, don’t tell me what to do. I know what I am doing”. This was the response a student got and yet it is written in the text that “constructive comment and criticism from students is always welcome”. It should be written on the text that some problems remain unsolved because of some lecturers who do not want to accept criticism. (C1/S64)

### **Authorship and Purpose**

Four students were interested in the authorship and purpose of the text. Their responses were of particular interest in that they evidenced an awareness of the underlying power relations in the construction of text. This was developed further in Cycle Two. One asked whether or not students had played a part in its production, while another indicated that knowledge about authorship would be useful for students requiring further information. A third respondent asked

At whom is this document aimed? Is it aimed at first year students only? Or is it aimed at departmental staff as well? If it is aimed at first year students, then a number of changes need to be implemented in order to make the information more accessible and relevant to first year students. (C1/S40)

The fourth student questioned the underlying purpose of and the assumptions underpinning the text:

Whose views are represented here? The students’ view or the staff’s view? Because I think that everything in this document is based on the assumption that we agree with this system of representation. (C1/S15)

## **Format of the Text and Linguistic Considerations**

Sixteen respondents mentioned some aspect or aspects of its general appearance and format with four students indicating that headings, sub-headings and short separate points had made it easily accessible. Many, however, had difficulty accessing the text. The small print and its lack of clarity was linked by several students to a lack of motivation to read it. It was described as “boring and not motivating to students”, “unappealing” and “uninviting”. Two students suggested that the use of diagrams (for example, of the university hierarchy) and cartoons of students and lecturers would make the text more lively and interesting. This comment summarises their perceptions:

There is nothing that attracts the reader to read this yellow document (except the colour) for instance there are no pictures on the document, there are no phrases that are written in bold and put into small or big rectangular boxes. One must take into consideration that the person reading . . . has never been to university . . . The document should therefore not be written as most university textbooks are with one kind of writing, no words underlined and no pictures. (C1/S66)

Criticisms of the general format of this text were often linked to its linguistic inaccessibility with a large majority of seventeen students experiencing difficulty with this. Seven drew attention to the “high level of language” which was “too formal for high school students” and indicated considerable confusion, though one added that it also “sets an example of the kind of language used at university”. Three pointed out that the text assumes knowledge of the university context especially in its use of undefined, university-specific terms which are “new and strange”. “Faculty Councils”, “Faculty Boards” and “Deans”, were cited by nine students as unfamiliar terms and two asked for a distinction between “course”, “course content” and “subject” to be provided.

### **5.4.2.3 Student Responses to Text C: While there is still time to do something about it consider carefully: HOW ARE YOU GOING TO COPE WITH YOUR READING LOAD?**

#### **Introduction**

The field of discourse of this text (see Appendix B, Text C(i) and extract below) is predominantly the propagation and advertisement of a specific service for first year students, particularly black, second language speakers. Other information, however, is also included and this focuses on difficulties students are likely to experience in the context of the university. Its tenor is “collective authorities” (both in the sense of people in authority and of those who have specialist knowledge) speaking to first year students who may benefit from an academic reading course. On the one hand, it is an informal, personal presentation of helpful experts and on the other an articulation of asymmetrical power relations which entail significant social distance between the participants. Its mode is as a, written transaction but in a colloquial, conversational style. It is intended to persuade and to caution and attempts to do this by presenting an argument apparently founded on the experience of many other students.

In its field, tenor and mode, the hybrid nature (Fairclough 1992c; 1995a) of this text is more evident than in Texts A(i) and B. It functions both as an advertisement, thus attempting to convince the “consumer” student about the benefits of a product and as a more authoritative, informed university voice backed by expert knowledge about student difficulties, particularly as they apply to second language students. This results in ambivalent, contradictory positioning of the students in the text. As consumers, they are positioned as a group which has, potentially at least, some “bargaining” power. As “deficient” second language speakers, however, they are unfavourably positioned as incoming “juniors” who are likely to fail (see 6.4.4.1. for a more detailed analysis of this text).

While there is time to do something about it, consider carefully:  
**HOW ARE YOU GOING TO COPE WITH YOUR READING LOAD?**

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New students often have the mistaken idea that most of the knowledge they are going to get at university will be given to them in lectures. While these provide an important input they are by no means the only sources of academic information. Tutorials and practicals are equally important, and so are textbooks and the library.

Your lecturers will expect you to find all sorts of information without their direct help, and to do that you will need to do a lot of reading.

Not only the content but also the language of the reading matter will be quite a lot more difficult than you have experienced up till now.

Particularly if you are going to study in the Arts, Social Science or Commerce Faculties, your reading load will grow as your studies progress.

Because they cannot cope effectively with their reading, many students end up floundering badly.

Moreover, students for whom English is not their first language will find this a serious problem.

The Language and Reading Centre can help.

We can help you find out  
HOW EFFECTIVELY YOU READ

Group assessments

On the morning of Wednesday 22 February 1989, as part of the Registration/Orientation Programme, all new students get the chance to have their academic reading skills assessed in respect of speed, word recognition, structure analysis, comprehension, etc. The results are confidential and participants are advised by letter whether they should consider getting help, and where to go for it.

## General Responses

General responses to this text, of which there were thirty-three, were wide-ranging and contradictory, clearly illustrating the different ways in which students position themselves in relation to interventions such as additional reading courses and to the white students and how they construct their educational needs.

Twelve students responded positively overall to the text, indicating that it introduced the consequences of inefficient reading realistically and was helpful in informing them about what to expect. In addition, it alerted them to potential problems, and created the opportunity to decide carefully about which assistance would benefit them. One student noted that it indicated that second language students were not “abandoned” and added that it provided “a sense of security”

because students become aware that they are not going to be “thrown into the jungle where no one is prepared to help” (C1/S22).

For some it was important to be informed beforehand about available help and this indicated that the university was concerned about disadvantaged backgrounds. As one student observed

for second language students another chance of improving their English is granted to them. Such an opportunity help them to achieve the same goals as those other students whom English is their mother tongue. (C1/S4)

Another appeared to be tempering her earlier view of the institution:

there are generalisations that white university mostly cater for white students. This generalisation has been proven wrong by also addressing the issue of second language speakers of English. (C1/S13)

There were, however, twenty-one students who articulated negative responses to this text, often completely contradicting other students’ constructions. This statement is a clear example of one such conflicting position:

I’ve found it most disturbing that students who do English as a second language subject should have been singled out as the ones having difficulty in coping with the reading loads or lack of reading skills. (C1/S4).

Another student articulated his perception more forcefully, asking,

is this help offered on racial lines or is it part of the academic process to alienate Blacks and show off their incapability of reading because of their academic backgrounds? Such things and statements are very humiliating and embarrassing indeed. (C1/S10)

Students tended to respond most specifically to claims and comments which were foregrounded in the text, most of which were contained in the first few paragraphs. One student, after reading the first paragraph, felt demotivated and “doubted whether [she] was still ambitious to come to the university” (C1/S80). Another found the first five paragraphs “very discouraging” while eight

students focused specifically on the negative effects of the phrases “the mistaken idea”, “cannot cope effectively with their reading load” and “floundering badly”. One student pointed out that the first sentence, beginning “new students often have the mistaken idea”, allocates blame to the students for their problems rather than the education system and makes the assumption that difficulties lie in linguistic problems rather than in the university’s capacity to provide adequately for students (cf Masenya 1994; see also 1.2.4).

### **Response to the Heading**

The two statements which head this text read:

While there is still time to do something about it consider carefully:  
HOW ARE YOU GOING TO COPE WITH YOUR READING LOAD?

These initial statements clearly had a significant, largely negative impact on students, with fourteen making specific mention of them. Most responses were at the very least wary and in one case decidedly hostile, though one person clearly valued the early warning. One student, who was generally extremely positive about the text, nevertheless concluded her comments by saying

however, the topic or rather the heading . . . gives a little chill down the spine . . . the headings that are written at the bottom of the text should have been written at the top and the student can see that it offers help. The way it is arranged makes one not to be interested to read about the load of work and at the same time overlooking the fact that after all it offers help. (C1/S4)

Others also viewed the heading, particularly the lexical choice “load”, as discouraging, one indicating that it causes “unnecessary worry”, is “harsh” and should be replaced by “work” (C1/S3) and another that it would cause students to hesitate about enrolling at university. The most extreme response, again from a student who, in general, responded positively to the text, viewed the heading as completely destructive:

If the prospective applicant is a coward he can die before the actual death that is he can already fail before starting his or her first academic year . . . The cause of his death if investigated will be the message conveyed by the headline only. (C1/S7)

By sharp contrast was the single response from a student who, at least in retrospect, clearly valued the early cautionary question. As he points out:

When I first saw the words “Reading Load”, really I didn’t thought it was going to be this kind of load I am experiencing now. A load is no child’s play, first years should be made aware of that. (C1/S5)

#### **5.4.2.4 General Conclusions**

One of the most striking features of this data, especially in terms of the notion of “otherness” discussed in Chapter Two (see 2.5), is that although some trends do emerge, the responses of the students are by no means homogeneous. The reactions discussed and quoted above provide a clear illustration of diversity, both in relation to linguistic proficiency and more general “ideological” opinion. This, as opposed to consensus and commonality of experience, is evidenced at times by stark contradictory construction of meaning and serves to temper any inclination to define black, second language speakers in monolithic terms as a unified group, sharing a common oppression and, perhaps even more significantly, a common response to it. This pertains particularly to the responses to Text C, in which students produced a range of contradictory comments and positioned themselves differently in relation to the offer of a special reading course.

Having acknowledged this diversity, however, it is also important to recognise emergent trends, this especially in the context of attempts to reformulate university texts more appropriately in response to rapidly shifting socio-political conditions and, more specifically, the university’s changing student population. The collective responses to these three texts, even in the context of diversity, nevertheless signal a degree of shared experience and focus on several of the inequitable socio-political conditions which provide the context for this study.



While this may be said of the responses to all the texts, this latter claim applies most directly to the university admission form, largely because of the nature of the questions it asks of students. Beginning at a broad ideological level, student responses highlight, directly and indirectly, a range of discriminatory apartheid practices which have profoundly impacted on their experience and perceptions. Constructions on their part which may, in a different social context, be reconstructed as over-suspicious or even somewhat militant, need to be interpreted in the context, first of general life experiences where discriminatory social and political practices have been implemented on the basis of population group and second, of grossly under-resourced, impoverished educational provision, also defined on the basis of race.

At the level of linguistic proficiency too, students experience a range of problems, though in this area many have difficulty with the terminology specific to university discourse which, in most cases, is totally unrelated to the home and school-based discourse. This was evident in responses to all three texts, though it applied most directly to Text B, where the use of unfamiliar terminology in conjunction with complex linguistic constructions and the density of extremely small print, compounded problems for black students.

### **5.4.3 Reflection: Changes to Texts and Evaluation of the Cycle**

#### **5.4.3.1 Changes to Text A: Application for Admission to Study in 1989**

Partly as a result of these students' comments and criticisms but also in the context of a broader consultative process, several changes have been made to the university admission form since 1989. These are realised both at a linguistic and at an ideological level with frequent intersections between the two.

In terms of ideological shifts, growing sensitivity towards several issues is emerging. For example, questions pertaining to military service and to parents' attendance at the university, both of which drew sharp comment from students, were excluded altogether from the 1993 admission form (see Appendix B, Text A(ii)). However, students are still required to provide information with regard to their population group and home language, the two areas to which

many objected most vehemently. During ongoing discussion on this issue, to which I was party, several requests were made for these categories to be excluded from the form. Members of the university administration, however, including the vice-chancellor, were adamant that the information was required primarily for purposes of implementing affirmative action policies rather than for more questionable state-related motives assumed by many students. The concerns of the students were, however, seriously considered and the compromise position adopted in 1992 was the retention of those sections but the addition of an explanatory note which reads:

the university requires the population group and other statistical information to monitor its affirmative action policy. (See Appendix B, Text A(ii), p 7)

The implications of this note, however, are obscured on at least two counts. Firstly, it is positioned as the last of fifteen notes on the penultimate page of the text, and despite references guiding readers to it, it nevertheless remains backgrounded in terms of the sequencing of information. Secondly, the construction of the note assumes considerable prior knowledge of notions such as affirmative action and it is reasonable to suspect that many students would make little or no sense of it.<sup>40</sup> If it is indeed the case that this information must be obtained at the beginning of the year through the admission form, it would be advisable to foreground the content of the note by placing it immediately under the relevant section and to reformulate it so that its purpose is clearer.

Other ideological shifts evident in the form which were not noted in the student responses but which contribute to a general shift of perspective, are the substitution of “gender” for “sex”, which indicates a growing awareness of the constructed nature of this category and the change from the reference to “handicapped students” to the currently favoured “differentially-abled” or “disabled”. There is also an indication that, particularly with regard to Finance and Accommodation, attempts are being made to pre-empt difficulties experienced by black students in recent years.

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40. It should be noted that one of the requests made by students was that these explanatory notes be foregrounded in the text. In the 1998 admission form (see Appendix B, Text A(iii)) they are inserted as they are needed. Also, the explanation is now provided in terms of statistical information only and not, as previously, in relation to affirmative action policies.

Linguistically, an attempt has been made to clarify unfamiliar terms and to provide more guidance for students uncertain about form-filling processes. One example of this is the inclusion of an explanatory gloss, “previous surnames” which provides another lexical formulation for those unfamiliar with “maiden name”. Further, in section two, the word “campus” has been included in parenthesis to expand on the meaning of “centre”, while “choice order” replaces “order of preference” when students are required to indicate the degrees or diplomas for which they wish to register. Not all these changes have come about as a direct result of this particular study but they do signal attempts to address the linguistic difficulties experienced by many second language speakers.

#### **5.4.3.2 Changes to Text B: Procedures in Relation to Suggestions, Criticisms and Complaints Concerning Academic Course Content or Teaching**

Student responses to this text were forwarded to the relevant members of the university administration and it is hoped that they will be taken into account when the text is reformulated, a process which is currently being undertaken. To date, this text has not been rewritten.

#### **5.4.3.3 Changes to Text C: HOW ARE YOU GOING TO COPE WITH YOUR READING LOAD?**

The text advertising the reading course was substantially rewritten, in this case, solely on the basis of student reactions to it. The writer of the text read the collated responses, discussed criticisms with the students and then reconstructed it (see Appendix B, Text C(ii) and extract below.) He then circulated the new text and only once students had had an opportunity to respond further, was it reproduced for the information of incoming students.

## **At University being a good reader can make a lot of difference**

New students often think that most of the knowledge they are going to get at university will be given to them in *lectures*. While these provide an important input they are *not the only sources of academic information*. Group classes (called *tutorials*) and *practicals* are equally important, as are *textbooks* and the *library*.

**Students have to find all sorts of information by themselves and to do that they need to do a lot of reading on their own.**

Both the content and the language of what needs to be read are likely to be more difficult than they have been used to until now. All fields of study - in Arts, Social Science, Commerce and the Sciences - require extensive reading. In some subjects the *amount* of reading is very large, while in others it may be less but requires *careful analysis* and *intensive study*.

**If they can process all this print efficiently they will save time, make better use of the information and remember it better.**

*The Language & Reading Centre at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg offers various ways in which registered and prospective students can improve their academic reading skills so that they can get the most out of their studies.*

This brief analysis of the changes made will focus largely on the opening paragraphs which drew most student reaction and which serve to position and construct them in particular ways. It will be supplemented by comments from students who participated in Cycle Two and who were asked to compare and evaluate the two texts (see 6.4.5). The first and most striking change to the text is in the formulation of its heading. The somewhat intimidating connotations of the question about the “reading load” which was remarked on by several students has been replaced by the less threatening and now positively constructed statement

At the university being a good reader can make a lot of difference.

The inclusion of the modal “can” in this context results in a slightly less assured and authoritative authorial voice which has the potential to result in a more positive interpretation on the part of the readers.<sup>41</sup>

New students in the second version are constructed more positively than they are in the first. They are no longer positioned as those who “often” have “mistaken” ideas and “end up floundering badly”. In addition, the particular focus on black students, most clearly illustrated in the underlined and euphemistic “students for whom English is not their mother tongue” has been excluded altogether with reference generally to “registered and prospective students”. Further, the foregrounding of the expert

We can help you find out  
HOW EFFECTIVELY YOU READ

has given way to the less personalised, more institution-oriented

The Language and Reading Centre at the University of Natal offers various ways in which . . . students can improve their academic reading skills.

In the light of student comment about these aspects of the text, it is difficult to claim with any certainty that all the changes are positive. Certainly, the exclusion of “deficit” lexical items is a distinct improvement, with students positioned much less patronisingly than previously. However, those who felt positive about the fact that second language speakers were being especially catered for could no longer find evidence of this special attention in the reconstructed text. This could, unintentionally on the writer’s part, result in a sense that, as one student put it, they were, after all, being “thrown into the jungle where no-one is prepared to help”. The important point here, centres once again around the diversity of student experience and response, the need to acknowledge this and to realise that any single text will be variously interpreted according to particular frames of reference brought to bear by the reader and the extent to which they are located within the various discourse types which constitute the text.

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41. This impression is borne out by later student comment on the impact of the different headings (see 6.4.5).

In the reconstructed text the students are not only positioned more positively but also less ambivalently. The primary reason for this is that the advertising discourse type so clearly evident in the first version, is no longer present. The students are no longer constructed as potential consumers; there appears to be no attempt to “sell” a commodity and therefore no further need for the somewhat forced and over-personalised lexical choices which mark the tenor of the rewritten text. It is this, in conjunction with the exclusion of “deficit” lexical choices that result in a clearer positioning of students. The ambivalent “double-positioning” has disappeared; this text is now typical of a university information sheet which relates intertextually with a brief do-it-yourself reading test, but one written in a manner consistent with other university produced texts. It should be noted, however, that this test was not intended as a substitute for the more formal course.

#### **5.4.4 Reflection**

##### **5.4.4.1 Strengths**

The data collected during this cycle provided the *Learning, Language and Logic* tutors with deeper and more concrete insight into a range of concerns and difficulties experienced by students in the university context, particularly with regard to university texts. It also alerted us to diverse, sometimes contradictory responses and the need to try to cater for this in the context of all classroom activities and discussion. In this respect it went some way towards answering questions one, two and three formulated during the planning phase (see 5.2.2).

A second positive aspect of the cycle was the willingness on the part of the writers of the various texts to discuss comment and criticism with the students, and the subsequent changes made, particularly to the reading text, had an extremely positive effect. Many students indicated appreciation, and surprise, that their comments had been seriously considered. The immediate production of an alternative text drew further positive reaction and was clearly perceived as signalling that their opinions were of some value. It is clear that, given a context conducive to constructive and open discussion, student opinion can, if only in a small way, have some

influence on change to university discourse and it is in this regard that Cycle One is of particular significance.

#### 5.4.4.2 Limitations

The first limitation relates to the principles of action research. As a pilot project, this cycle was not conceptualised within the strict requirements of action research and, although the four stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (see 5.1) are evident, there was not an adequately rigorous progression between them. For example, there was inadequate participation (both involvement and collaboration) on the part of the students, first in discussing the purpose of these tutorials and also in the planning and evaluation of the cycle. Some students expressed confusion about precisely how this section of the course related to other components. Also, there was insufficient collaboration with the staff. Although the cycle was discussed fully with the tutors in *Learning, Language and Logic*, it nevertheless did not meet the levels of involvement and collaboration explicitly required by emancipatory action research. In addition, the cycle was not formally evaluated, which means that tutors relied on anecdotal responses to it which could not provide sufficient evidence of collective student opinion. Because of these inadequacies, it could be argued that the initial intervention does not warrant the status of an action research cycle and should perhaps be presented as a pilot project. However, as a preliminary, if tentative investigation, it provided a significant basis for the second, more substantial cycle. The links between the two cycles, and more importantly, the developments which resulted from the first intervention (see 6.1), are extremely important and it has therefore been included here as the first of two action research cycles.

The most serious limitation of this cycle, however, was that my own conceptualisation of *text* was limited to its communicative purpose and the task was formulated on this assumption. The pilot study did not, therefore, foreground the social construction of language and text, its plurality of meaning, or the power relations embedded in it, nor did it incorporate any notion of discourse. As Thompson notes, “language is not simply a structure which can be employed for

communication or entertainment, but a socio-historical phenomenon which is embroiled in human conflict” (1984: 2).

Certainly, the positioning of students and some of the power relations evident in the texts emerged in the students’ reaction to them. Nevertheless, the question of the way in which students are positioned within the university context, although implied in the task, was not adequately fore-grounded and required more explicit development. The task could have facilitated a deeper understanding of the university context and the power relations that shape it had it been conceptualised using a broader, more socially oriented notion of text.

Insights which emerged from this evaluation, and from the reflection and analysis of student responses that preceded it, were the basis for the planning stage of Cycle Two.



## Chapter Six

### Second Research Intervention: Cycle Two

#### 6.1 The Relationship between Cycle One and Cycle Two

As has already been explained, Cycle One of this research programme was initiated as a result of pedagogical speculation about how first year, second language students respond to and interpret some of the texts with which they are confronted as they enter university. The short, preliminary study was concerned with the problems encountered when accessing those texts and with the possibility of reconstructing them in the light of student criticism. This was done with a view to rendering them linguistically more accessible and ideologically more acceptable to future, incoming students. Although power relationships and the positioning of students within the university were not specifically addressed, these questions were implicit in the task and emphasis on them certainly emerged in the data.

Once I had reflected on Cycle One and identified the limitations of my concept of *text* (see 5.4.4.2), it became evident that I needed to focus more specifically on power relations, student positioning and the social construction of text. Cycle Two, which consists of a series of thirty tutorials, is underpinned by insights gained from Cycle One and is, in part at least, a continuation of the exploration of student responses to university texts as they constitute part of the total discourse of the institution. It is also an expansion and more focused development of several of the notions implicit in Cycle One. Therefore, it is both a development and expansion of Cycle One, sharing several implicit features with it, while at the same time shifting the emphasis of the study.

The first explicit shift, which is a direct result of the reflection on Cycle One, is in the formulation of the overall purpose of Cycle Two. Cycle One excluded any explicit acknowledgement of the extent to which power relations are a key consideration in the

constitution of subjectivity. By contrast, Cycle Two is conceptualised specifically in terms of the power relations within the university in order to help facilitate amongst students an understanding of institutional discourse and of how they are positioned and located within it. This means that the consideration of specific texts has been located within the context of a range of other activities, which include reflection on school experience and the construction of dialogues. This was done in order to provide a framework for understanding the social construction of discourses and the texts which constitute them. It also resulted in the primary focus shifting from the possibility of changing texts to include a broader understanding of the university constituted by multiple, inter-textually related discourses and the constitution of subjects within it.

Other shifts of emphasis and conceptual developments between the two cycles are contingent on the first. For example, the texts considered by students are drawn from a broader range of university discourses than in Cycle One. This provides students with a more representative spread of texts which has the potential to alert them to the existence of several, sometimes contradictory discourses within the same institution. This does not, however, imply that the texts used in Cycle One were excluded. On the contrary, one of the tasks specifically designed to illustrate the different positioning of students, was based on a comparison of the “Reading Load” text analysed by students in Cycle One and the rewritten version which was produced as a direct result of their criticism (see Appendix G). Significantly, the texts for Cycle Two were selected by the students themselves, which went part of the way towards addressing the lack of adequate student participation which was identified as a limitation in Cycle One.

The final development to be considered here and, arguably, the most important one is the difference in my conceptualisation of *text* in the two cycles. In Cycle One, I conceived of text primarily as a means of communication. I later identified this as a serious shortcoming in that it limited the domain of enquiry and excluded a consideration of broader power relations. In the second cycle, the underpinning notion of text is informed by Said’s view that

texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it they are nevertheless a part of the social world, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted . . . The realities of

power and authority - as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies - are realities that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers, that solicit the attention of critics. (1983: 4-5)

It is also in line with Cherryholmes' view that "to understand a text, one moves from what is written to what is not written and back again, from what is present to what is absent, from statements to their historical setting" (1988: 8-9). In addition to the communicative function, then, text needs to be viewed as a socially constructed entity to be interpreted within its specific socio-historical conditions.

## 6.2 The Plan

### 6.2.1 Overview and Purpose of Cycle Two

The second cycle was conceived of as a programme in Critical Language Study<sup>42</sup> and integrated into the *Learning, Language and Logic* curriculum in 1991. Its overall development was partly a result and an extension of Cycle One, though some aspects of the programme were entirely new. It consisted of thirty forty-five minute tutorials plus a four hour workshop which took place on a Saturday morning at the beginning of August (see Table 2).<sup>43</sup> It was taught to ninety-two students in groups of about fifteen. Forty-two students (or three groups) participated directly in the research process and it is their responses which are analysed in this chapter. The group consisted of twenty-six males and sixteen females, twenty-seven of whom were from urban and fifteen from rural areas. Their ages ranged between eighteen and thirty-one and their average age

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42. Critical Language Study (CLS) was the term with which I was most familiar at the time of this research and therefore used with the students. This follows Fairclough who describes it as an "alternative orientation" to the study of language which "would place a broad conception of the social study of language at the core of language study" (1989: 13). Most frequently, however, I have opted for use of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) which is the currently favoured term and which refers specifically to educational interventions in classroom contexts. While it could be argued that CLS suggests a greater emphasis on the analytical aspects of language study than CLA, the two can in fact be used largely synonymously. Crucially, in their insistence in locating each text in *specific* social and material conditions, both differ significantly from Fowler's earlier Critical Linguistics (see 3.5.3.).

43. The items indicated in bold print on this table are those which constitute the CLS programme.

was twenty-two.<sup>44</sup> Seventeen of these students entered university immediately after leaving school while for twenty-five there had been a break of between one and eight years before enrolling at university. The students were drawn from three Faculties, twenty-five from Arts, ten from Social Science and seven from Science.

Unlike Cycle One, which took place during the second semester, the CLS programme was deliberately placed right at the beginning of the year because this is the time when students are first exposed to a range of experiences in their new, unfamiliar environment.<sup>45</sup> In addition, this early inclusion was intended to illustrate principles embodied in the methodology and the materials which could provide a framework for the rest of the course. It is important to note, however, that it was not conceptualised as an intervention intended to improve grammatical competence nor was it perceived as an alternative to in-depth academic reading and writing activities. On the contrary, as Table 2 indicates, the introduction of academic essay writing as a specific genre which was intended to provide students with initial access to some university discourses, was a crucial component of the introductory section of the curriculum. It was hoped that what students learnt in the CLS programme would assist them in their understanding of these academic tasks.

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44. The average age of white students coming into the university is about nineteen. Because of disrupted schooling and lack of financial resources, however, many black students enter university later, hence the higher average age.

45. In the light of Gee's (1996) discussion on the acquisition of discourse, it may, with hindsight, have been more beneficial to the students to have included these tutorials slightly later in the year.

**Table 2: Programme for Cycle Two**

Week	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6
1	Introductions Journals Timetables	<b>Writing tut: my role at university</b> <i>Appendix C</i>	<b>Reflection on school experience. Paragraph writing: the “good student”</b> <i>Appendix D</i>		<b>Construction and writing of dialogues</b>  <i>Appendix D</i>	
2	<b>Presentation of dialogues and discussion</b>  <i>Appendix D</i>	<b>Consolidation of material so far Discussion -- difference between school and university</b> Rationale for 3L methodology  <i>Appendix D</i>		<b>University Texts Questionnaire: “The January Mail”</b> <i>Appendix E(i)</i>	<b>Written response to university text</b>  <i>Appendix E(ii)</i>	<b>Note-making skills - introductory discussion</b>  <i>Appendix F(i)</i>
3	<b>Note Making Skills: Critical Language Study</b>  <i>Appendix F(ii)</i>			<b>Quick Quiz Consolidation of insights re note making</b>	<b>Discussion and comparison of two reading texts</b>  <i>Appendix G</i>	
4	Time budgeting	Library Practical		Analysis of first essay topic		Essay writing process
5	Library Practical		Essay writing process: dealing with academic texts: reading skills: objectives; skimming and scanning; key points; note taking.			
<b>EASTER VACATION</b>						
6	Problem solving tutorial	Surveying textbooks		<b>Voices of a university: introduction to Critical Language Study tutorials via discussion of collage -- brief discussion of intertextuality; introduction to modality and discussion and written response to text</b> <i>Appendices H &amp; I</i>		
7	Problem solving tutorial	<b>Reading skills for critical awareness: Ivanič text</b>  <i>Appendix J</i>		<b>Critical Language Study tutorials -- modality and lexical choice ; positioning of readers; oppositional reading</b> <i>Appendix I (i and ii)</i>		
8	Problem solving tutorial	<b>Critical Language Study tutorials -- the use of articles; choice of voice; sequencing of information.</b>  <i>Appendix I (iii, iv and v)</i>			<b>Writing task -- critical analysis of university texts</b> <i>Appendix K</i>	<b>Evaluation of Critical Language Study component</b> <i>Appendix L</i>
19	<b>Post programme workshop: Repeat of positioning exercise completed in week two; repeat of “good student” paragraph; articulations of future roles/positions in the university context; evaluation of university experiences to date; identification of changes during the first semester.</b> <i>Appendix M</i>					

This second cycle of tutorials was divided into two sections. The purpose of the first eight tutorials was to establish a collective narrative framework for the later, more linguistically

focused activities. They were designed to gather information from students about aspects of their personal histories, particularly the circumstances which led to their enrolling at the university, their perceptions of the roles they intended to play in the university context and their reflections on experiences of different educational institutions. The second section was more specifically focused on texts drawn from university discourses. It was designed to facilitate discussion around various aspects of the university as an educational institution and led up to the consideration of discrete linguistic constructions, the ways in which these position students and can, in some contexts, encode asymmetrical power relationships.

### 6.2.2 Central Research Questions

The research questions which informed the development and implementation of this cycle were:

1. How do first year, second language students respond to university discourses during their first six months at university?
2. How do they position themselves within the institution during the first semester?
3. How can the power relations and institutional practices of the University of Natal as represented through its texts, be made more explicit to first year, second language students?
4. What is the role of Critical Language Awareness in facilitating an understanding of institutional practices and developing an interrogative relationship between students and the institution?
5. How can this process be integrated into *Learning, Language and Logic* without detracting from its other, more skills-based activities?

## **6.2.3 Description of the Programme for Cycle Two**

### **6.2.3.1 Part One: Orientation to the University**

This began with a short writing task in two parts (see Appendix C). First, students were asked to describe the events that led up to their coming to this university and then, after reflection on the kinds of activities they thought university students were generally involved in, they were asked to respond to the question: What will I do at this university? The purpose of this was partly to provide an opportunity for an early assessment of students' general writing skills but, much more importantly, it was intended to gauge how students were positioning themselves in the university context during the first few weeks and, in the light of this, what range of activities they saw as possibilities for them. The precise wording of this task was extremely important as bias towards any one kind of activity (academic tasks, for example) had to be avoided so that, as far as possible, students were not "led" in the answers they provided. In addition, lexical choices were significant. The word "roles", for example, was excluded on the grounds that for some second language speakers it may be an unfamiliar term and therefore cause confusion. The central, closely related concepts underpinning this task (though they were not explicitly discussed with the students) were those of multiple and potentially contradictory subject identities and subject positioning within multiple discourses, both of which were discussed in Chapter Three (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2) and which will be used to inform the analysis of these responses later in this chapter (see 6.4.5).

The programme then shifted to include reflection about school experiences, a short written exercise on what, in their opinion, constitutes a good student, and the construction of two dialogues, the first between themselves and a friend and the second, on the same subject, between themselves and a senior history master at the school (see Appendix D). The first of these exercises has been part of the curriculum in previous years but a crucial difference in this programme was that, instead of simply being asked to recall school conditions and experiences with a view to contrasting them with the university context, students were required to compare their educational experiences (here, the purpose was to foreground differences rather than commonality) and reflect more critically on the institutional context and its construction. Questions focused, for example, on who made the school rules and who benefited from them, as

well as on the kind of relationships students had had with their teachers. In other words, students were being alerted to what Foucault calls the “conditions of possibility” (1970a: 127) of school discourse and to the linguistic constraints and regulations imposed on them as speakers in the school context (see also 3.3.4). Discussion around such issues began to make the underlying power relations in schools more explicit and introduced students (again, without specifically naming the various concepts) to Thompson’s (1984; 1990) notion of asymmetrical power relations and to Althusser’s (1971b) concept of interpellation, to the question of subject identity and positioning and to processes of naturalisation and reification in the school context (Thompson 1984, 1990). Students also considered their ideas about what constitutes a good student and here, notions of agency and determinacy were relevant as they discussed the extent to which their ideas originated with them and the extent to which they were shaped by parental, educational and broader societal expectations.

The information provided by students in these two initial writing tasks goes a small way towards meeting Comstock’s requirement that one of the features of a critical research method is that it should develop an understanding of the inter-subjective meanings, values and motives held by all members of the group. For him “the investigator seeks, through dialogue with the participants, to construct a coherent account of the understandings they have of their world” (1982: 380).

Two short written pieces can hardly claim to provide “a coherent account” of the students’ perceptions of their world and “dialogue” constituted through written texts, has severe limitations. Nevertheless, they do provide what is defined below (see 6.4.2.1) as a partial, collective narrative of this particular group of students. Insight into the perceptions of some aspects of their educational experiences and the ways in which these students define themselves in a new, academic context is crucial in the context of this study.

The construction of the two dialogues provided a new dimension to this part of the course, which fed in to other considerations of power, positioning and naturalised processes and here, Hymes’ conceptualisation of social interactions and speech styles (1972), informed the development of the task. Role plays on the basis of written dialogue resulted in lengthy discussion on the way in which context and social relationships - difference in age, status and power, for example -



resulted in significantly different linguistic encoding. The discussion, however, focused not on the naturalness of these relationships but on their social construction. The idea that “words change their meanings according to the positions held by those who use them” (Pecheux 1975: 111), was central here.

Diversity of opinion about whether or not “respect for the aged” was automatically warranted, led to the consideration of the role played by social and historical conditions in the shaping of human behaviour and this resulted in discussion on the central importance of context and the extent to which meaning is constructed by it. This task, which was collaborative, also served as an indication of the wide range of linguistic and socio-linguistic competence second language speakers have, most particularly when they are able to pool their resources.

### **6.2.3.2 Defining the University through its Discourses**

From this point, the focus moved from the school to the university context. Students began discussing the various ways in which the institution divides its social space and how it represents itself, particularly through texts. They then worked with a questionnaire (see Appendix E (i)) designed to elicit their responses to the initial range of texts, referred to as *The January Mail*, which they had received as incoming students. Then, concentrating on one text, they considered authorship, purpose and attitude and were also asked to suggest any changes they thought necessary (see Appendix E(ii)).

During the third week, students discussed the purpose of lectures at university, listened to a lecture entitled *The Challenges of Critical Language Study* (see Appendix F(ii)) and then, in groups, completed a series of note-making activities (see Appendix F(i) and (ii)). This had a dual purpose, firstly to make explicit some of the theoretical principles underpinning the programme and also to facilitate the development of students’ note-making strategies. This was also directly linked to a slightly later reading exercise which was based on Ivanič’s (1990) *Critical Language Awareness in Action* (see Appendix J). The next task (see Appendix G) involved a comparison of two texts advertising reading courses on the campus. The first of these (Text C in the first

cycle, Text A in this task) was part of Cycle One (see 5.4.2.3 and 5.4.3.3) which, as a direct result of student comment and criticism during *Learning, Language and Logic* tutorials, had been substantially rewritten. The outcome was a very different document, one which excluded many of the original negative structures, made different lexical choices that were “non-deficit model” options and generally positioned students much more positively. Again, multiple subject identity and subject positioning as well as plurality of meaning were the concepts underpinning this task as students began to be more specifically directed to particular linguistic considerations such as lexical and pronoun choice and the ways in which these shift the positioning of students.

The next part of the programme consisted of nine tutorials during which students discussed, analysed and wrote about the ways in which a selection of discrete linguistic structures are used in a range of university texts (see Appendix I). Two important and inter-related features provided the context for this work.

The first was that students themselves provided the texts on which the exercises were based. They drew from a wide range of sources which included residence rules, the Code of Conduct, extracts from student newspapers and the university’s Mission Statement, political slogans and advertisements off notice boards, Black Students’ Society information sheets, and the vice-chancellor’s opening address to first year students. This process cannot be viewed as a “negotiated curriculum” in the sense that students were required to make choices from an already defined set of options. In that sense it was what Grundy (1987) refers to as “pseudo power sharing”. However, it also needs to be interpreted in the context of the argument in Chapter Two regarding the power and authority of the teacher/researcher (see 2.5) and the necessity not to obscure the inevitable power relationships that exist between teachers and learners in the interests of what could equally be termed pseudo-democracy. In the context of this course, the materials developers had a particular pedagogical purpose informing their decisions and this had to be set against the students’ ability, readiness and willingness to participate more fully in the construction of the curriculum. In addition, physical and time constraints had to be taken into account. Logistically, even this process made pre-planning difficult and preparation somewhat pressured. But this difficulty was out-weighed by the benefits of incorporating students, if only to a small degree, into the development of the curriculum and the likelihood that student-selected

texts are likely to have a more immediate bearing on their lives and, by extension, their level of motivation. This was borne out by a tutor later when she evaluated the programme:

Students were very motivated and engaged when doing the critical language exercises. Using material which has real consequences in their lives certainly enabled them to see **why** certain structures are used in particular linguistic contexts, in a way that using just any material would not. I think it also motivated students to understand and be motivated to **master** linguistic structures in a way that traditional grammar teaching seldom achieves.

The second feature was the use of a large collage (see Appendix H) which was a combination of and further selection from the students' choices. This especially constructed "text from text", entitled *Voices of a University*, had two functions. First, it was used in an attempt to keep the broader context in mind (and literally in sight) while concentrating on discrete structures. In terms of Fairclough's model (1989, 1992c, 1995a, see 3.4.2), it aimed to include the interpretative and explanatory dimensions of analysis while nevertheless focussing primarily on the linguistic description of specific texts. Second, it was a means of introducing students to the notion of intertextuality, the intersection of meaning between texts and the impact of each on the meaning of others. This was particularly influenced by the emphasis on intertextuality by Bakhtin (1981), Fairclough (1992c; 1995a), Halliday (1985) and Halliday and Hasan (1989). Later tutor evaluations of the programme indicated that, at least for some, this had been effective:

It has helped students to realise the importance of the broader context in the production and interpretation of texts, considering the way in which meaning of texts is influenced by other texts and to see that different texts position readers in different ways.

The construction of this collage, which is itself a complex hybrid text (Fairclough 1992c; 1995a), served as an interesting example of how the research process is shaped by the interests and choices of the researcher. Although the students had provided me with all the texts, further choices from it nevertheless had to be made and these choices were mine. The juxtapositioning of texts on the collage, the extract from the Mission Statement and student responses to it, for example, construct meaning in a particular and interested way and this needs to be acknowledged as influencing the research process.

All the language tutorials were based on texts chosen by the students and included on the collage. The linguistic constructions selected for consideration were modality, the active and passive voice, the article and the use of pronouns (see Appendix I). The significance of lexical choice was also considered, often in conjunction with one or more of the structures. I selected these particular linguistic features following Janks (1991) and also on the assumption that they are central to the understanding of how power relations are linguistically represented and because they are relatively accessible for students to identify and analyse (for a later and very similar selection see also The New London Group 1996). With hindsight, there is no reason why these particular features should have been chosen above other options.

Students began by dealing with each construction separately and were engaged in a wide range of tasks - reading, discussing, analysing and writing. In terms of the action research process, exercises based on particular constructions can be viewed as small cycles (within the larger cycle) of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, with each mini-cycle relating to and building on the others so that, by the end of a three week period, students were able to analyse a text using their combined knowledge (see Appendix K).

Within the context of the formal *Learning, Language and Logic* curriculum, the programme ended with an evaluation of the CLS programme by all students (see Appendix L). The three research groups, however, attended an additional four hour workshop at the beginning of August. The purpose of this was for them, after six months at university, to repeat the two written tasks from the beginning of the year, to re-read what they had originally written and then to identify the reasons for any changes in their perceptions or experiences which may have occurred (see Appendix M). As in the case of the other parts of the programme, an analysis of their responses to this is provided below.

## **6.3 Implementation**

### **6.3.1 Introduction**

The implementation of this cycle was logistically more complex than Cycle One. First, in addition to the thirty time-tabled tutorials which constituted the programme, it was necessary to negotiate a formal research contract (see Appendix N) with the forty two student participants. Second, a four hour post-programme workshop had to be arranged on a Saturday morning in August. For the tutors involved in teaching *Learning, Language and Logic*, it was necessary to run a training workshop over and above the weekly curriculum development meetings. Tutors were also requested to evaluate the course as it developed (see Appendix O).

### **6.3.2 Tutor Participation and Training**

The implementation of this programme necessitated the full co-operation and support of the teaching staff. While the six tutors quickly indicated their willingness to participate, it was nevertheless essential that their role was fully negotiated and that they became an integral part of the ongoing process. Some expressed reservations about their ability to facilitate students' understanding of unfamiliar, "political" material and it was agreed that an additional training workshop would help to allay some of their disquiet.

The purpose of the training workshop, which was held before the beginning of the term, was to introduce tutors to the central tenets of critical language theory and to consider in detail the purpose and structure of the first eight weeks of the year. It consisted of small group activities in which tutors discussed and analysed various power relations in South Africa and the marginalisation of specific social groups specifically blacks, women and the disabled and how these are linguistically encoded. Having done that, there was a formal lecture on critical discourse analysis based largely on Ivanič's article *Critical Language Awareness in Action* (1990) and Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989). This was followed by further discussion and questions.

Decisions about which groups would be part of the formal research programme and which would experience it simply as an aspect of the *Learning, Language and Logic* curriculum were also taken during the workshop. It was agreed that, although data from the entire group of ninety-two students would be duplicated in case it became necessary to analyse a larger sample at a later stage, three groups (forty-two students) would constitute the “research” group. This decision was based firstly on the need to limit the sample size and secondly on which tutors had sufficient general teaching experience, interest in and familiarity with the material to feel confident about facilitating a group. It also resulted in a discussion about the mediating role of the tutors in any research of this nature and an acknowledgement of the fact that, even if stringent attempts were made to control for variation in tutor interventions and guidance, there would inevitably be differences in the corporate and individual experience and response of each small group. The mediating role of the tutor is, of course, only one of the influences on the interpretations and responses of the students. Even more crucial are the “members’ resources” (Fairclough 1989: 141) brought to bear on this programme as an educational experience, the different degrees to which students locate themselves in the various discourses of the university and how these discourses relate intertextually to their primary discourses (Gee 1996; see also 3.3.4.1) It was agreed, however, that the diversity and potential richness of response resulting from this kind of educational research was preferable to any attempts to limit and control the nature of the experience and that the significance of the mediating role of the tutor and indeed, the different frames of reference of the students, needed to be recognised as an element of the total process rather than obscured because they rendered the research process somewhat “messy”. Each week throughout the programme, tutors completed an evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix O).

### **6.3.3 The Negotiation of a Research Contract**

In keeping with the current view in critical research literature that researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure that participants are aware of the purpose of research and that there is potential benefit in it for them (see, for example, Carr and Kemmis 1986; McNiff 1988; Walker 1996), I attempted to make my intention as a researcher as transparent as possible, to explain

quite explicitly the nature and purpose of the research and to negotiate a research contract with the potential participants.

A meeting with the three “research groups” was set up during a tutorial time in the first week of term. I had prepared a draft contract for discussion and negotiation, a copy of which was given to each student (see Appendix N). Initially, students listened with interest and appeared amenable to the proposal but, with little or no verbal response, it was difficult to gauge their precise perceptions of it. I interpreted their reserve, not necessarily as a negative response, but as being largely due to the unfamiliar nature of the request and an understandably limited comprehension of exactly what I was asking of them.

There was, however, one senior student in the class who had clearly had research experience and was aware of some of the current debates, particularly as regards the relationship between the researcher and the participants. He formulated several extremely pertinent questions about the potential gain for me through the research process at the expense of the students and asked “What's in this for us?” He also asked why this research was confined to black students and whether I intended to treat them as “subjects” or “objects”.

The discussion generated by these questions resulted in several students asking about time commitment and precise obligations and then a request from the whole class for a further tutorial in which they could discuss the request without the presence of a tutor. This was agreed to. Students met the following day and, having called me in to respond to a few further questions of clarification, they all agreed to participate in the research programme, without suggesting any additions or amendments to the contract.<sup>46</sup>

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46. An interesting aspect of this process is that it indicates that a pre-pedagogic or pre-research stage is not really possible because teachers' relationships with students are always already pedagogic and research orientated.

## **6.4 Observation**

### **6.4.1 Introduction**

Many of the responses to postmodernist discourses discussed in Chapter Two (Apple 1993; Haber 1994; Hartsock 1990; Hennessy 1993; Kenway 1995; Walby 1992; Yeatman 1994) reveal a broad acceptance of the need to foreground diversity, difference, partiality, multiple subjectivities and the importance of specific historical contexts. This is tempered, to varying degrees, by an insistence that cognisance be taken of common experience and of similar responses to that experience and that the impact of social structures (the mechanisms of apartheid in South Africa for example), on the lives of people should be seriously acknowledged. In the context of this study, the analysis of the data from Cycle One evidences both common and diverse responses to university texts and serves as a caution against foregrounding one tendency to the exclusion of the other, searching either for a seamless, uniform response or for responses so diverse as to be mutually exclusive.

The need to account for both commonality and diversity has been explicitly acknowledged in the analysis of the data from Cycle Two, which will be analysed from two perspectives. Firstly, via a content analysis, common trends will be classified and analysed within specific writing tasks. Here, the central writing tasks from the first part of the programme have been analysed. For the sake of clarity, however, it has been necessary to make some selections from the more minor writing tasks. For example, the dialogues, which formed part of the reflection on school experience, were described above (see 6.2.3.1) but have not been analysed here. In addition, and for the same reason, only one of the two sets of responses to the final analysis of text has been analysed. It should be noted that these writing activities were interspersed with small group or plenary discussions around a range of issues and that tutors were involved in such discussions. For the sake of coherence, therefore, brief descriptive sections will link the various analyses. It is also necessary to read this part of the chapter in conjunction with the description of the programme provided above.

Secondly, the data will be classified and analysed according to individual case studies (see Appendices P-S). Four case studies will be discussed here, three of them in detail and the fourth



as illustrative of one particular feature of student response to university discourses. The cases selected are those which most clearly illustrate diverse life experience, initial student positioning within the university and subsequent responses to institutional discourses. The primary purpose here is to highlight “splits”, discontinuities and contradictions in the data both between and within subjects.

## **6.4.2 Orientation to the University: The Students’ Collective Narrative**

### **6.4.2.1 Introduction**

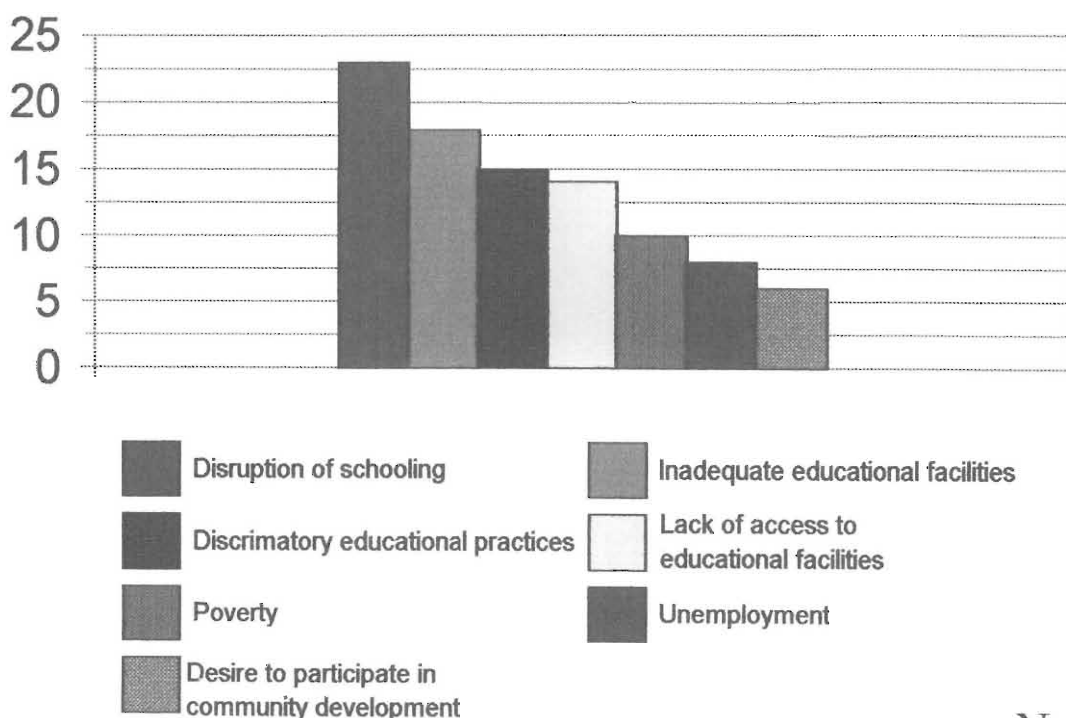
The first eight tutorials of the second cycle were referred to as *Orientation to the University*. The data collated and analysed from this section is presented as a collective narrative of this group of students and is intended to frame and inform the discussion of later, more linguistically orientated tasks.

On the assumption that shared experiences and insights would emerge from this data, I undertook a content analysis of the various tasks. Content analysis is a method of interpretation where the primary aim is to analyse non-quantitative documents (in this case written student texts) and to translate aspects of them into quantifiable data (Cohen and Manion 1980). My precise purpose in this context was to identify and to categorise common trends in students’ perceptions and experiences and also to ascertain how frequently various themes appeared. Each section of the collective narrative is depicted as a bar graph which represents the major trends. In addition, an illustrative selection of extracts taken directly from student writing complements and enriches the quantified data. This collective (though necessarily partial) history of the students who participated in the research was intended to provide a means towards a better understanding of some of the life experiences which impact on their perceptions of the university and viewed as part of the broad socio-historical backdrop against which other texts can be read. Although it attempts to capture trends which emerge in their writing, it is important to acknowledge that no two students will have had identical experiences and that any fine-grained analysis of a single student’s perceptions would need to take account of a wide range of individual variables including race, class, gender and age.

### 6.4.2.2 Events that Led to Admission to University

The first section of this narrative records students’ responses to a request to describe the events that led up to their admission to the university (see Appendix C, part 1). Although seven of the forty-two participants simply described the application procedure required by the university the vast majority, as Figure 2 shows, focussed on a combination of a range of social and educational experiences which together contributed towards a decision to apply for university admission.

**Figure 2: Factors Contributing to Desire for University Education**



N = 42

A notable theme emerging here is the recognition of the detrimental effects of unemployment, the resultant poverty and lack of access to educational facilities which is experienced by many black South African families. For one student, “the first event that led me to come to university is the hard life that uneducated people experience” (C2/S22) while another, female student linked the general economic conditions directly to her own family, saying, “ Since I am from THE DESTITUTE FAMILY it was my father’s will and desire for me to be educated and help my

family from poverty conditions” (C2/S45).<sup>47</sup> Many black students had experienced severe disruption of their schooling with inadequate educational facilities, the poor training of teachers and discriminatory educational practices contributing to instability and dissatisfaction.<sup>48</sup> This account is typical of numerous experiences:

In 1988 when I first did my matric I was one of the science and mathematics students. That was when my teacher for science introduced this university to me. Unfortunately I could not finish my school because of a boycott and I was expelled

I then went to a school at Tugela Ferry where there was no physical science and no permanent teacher for mathematics. I was discouraged in both fields. By then the university had been introduced to me so I had to choose another school and go to the university. I should have come in 1990 but the department decided to hold my results which were later released in 1990. That's why I came in 1991. (C2/S25)

#### 6.4.2.3 Initial Positioning in the University Context

As Figure 3 shows, another important dimension of this narrative is the ways in which students initially position themselves within the university context (see Appendix C, part 2).<sup>49</sup>

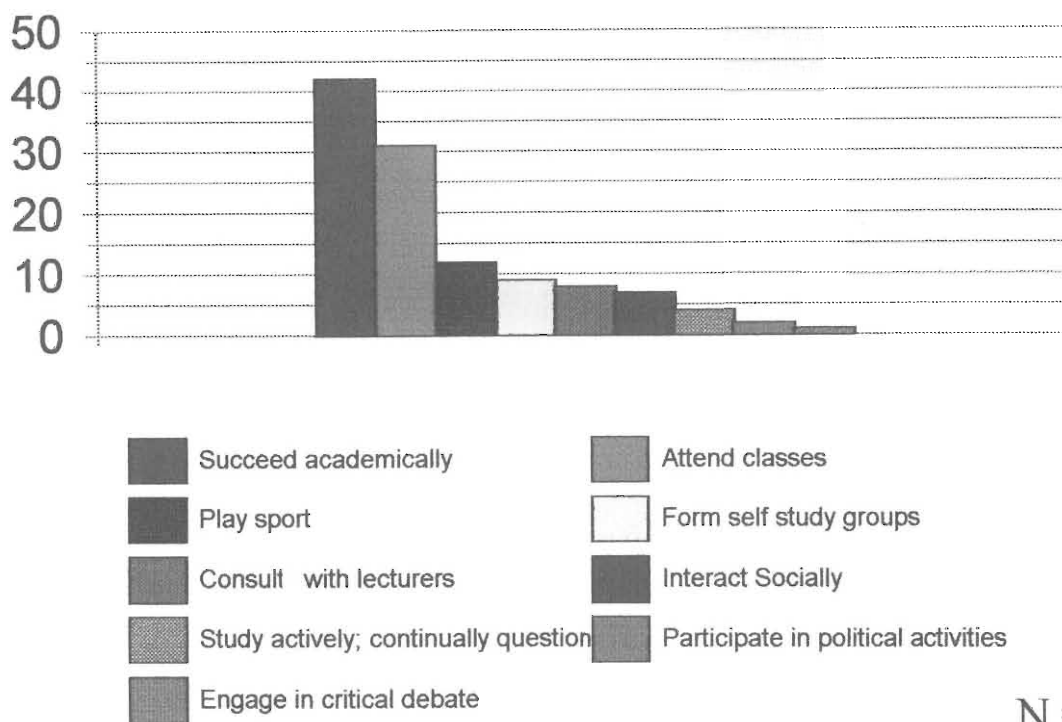
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47. There were originally forty-five students allocated with numbers for this research but three of them only attended the course for a few days. This explains why this student number is forty-five but data from only forty-two students was analysed.

48. For a very interesting narrative account of teachers working in apartheid South Africa, see Constat (1997).

49. It should be noted here that the majority of these students (thirty of the forty-two) had attended Preparing for University (PFU), a week-long orientation course which is specifically designed for black students. No responses to this question, however, could be directly linked to the programme and there were no evident differences between the responses of those who attended and those who did not. Nevertheless, the possibility that PFU shaped student perceptions should be acknowledged.

### Figure 3: Anticipated Activities at the University



When asked the question: “What will you do at this university?” all respondents foregrounded the importance of academic success and the necessity for time management and discipline. There was a strong emphasis on perseverance, many resolutions to attend all classes and frequent expressions of commitment to fulfilling a range of academic requirements and deadlines with one student providing the summarising statement for many, “the pre-requisite for everything is to work hard in my studies and to obey the rules of the campus” (C2/10).

Though academic and related tasks were clearly the primary concern, these were often defined against other activities or opportunities with sporting commitments being the most notable. The position articulated by this student incorporates several interrelated activities:

I will first learn to communicate well with people from other races. Sport is the only brake a student can have, in between his/her studies I would also like to participate in sport . . . Concerning my studies I will work as hard as I can to be

considered as one of those students who let their school work come first. What I'll also like to do is to rise up the name of this university. I can only do that by obtaining very impressive results for other people to come and join us. I will not go to bed with something I did not understand in fact I'm not prepared to let the lecturer live me blank about what he/she has been lecturing. (C2/S22)

A notable absence from students' initial positioning of themselves within the university context was as critical thinkers engaged in and contributing to ongoing argument and debate. While all were prepared to respond to academic requirements and some to engage in discussion with lecturers about difficulties with courses, there was only one, at this stage, who positioned himself as a central actor constructed in dynamic, potentially conflictual academic interaction. For him "the university is the centre of political argument and aspirations" where students are exposed "to the battle of ideas embracing different ideologies" (C2/S38).

Another subject about which students were significantly silent was political involvement, with only two students, both of them male, mentioning it at all. The first explained his position in considerable detail, questioning the sincerity of the university's claim to be an equal opportunity institution and indicating his desire to engage in oppositional student politics (for detailed discussion of this student see 6.4.9.3, Case Study Two). The second student took a radically different position in his justification for avoiding political engagement:

I know that politics is a daily bread we eat it; we sleep it and we walk it but I will avoid involving myself to it. It is not that I am cowide but in life everyone have his goal, myne is to uplift my people with science education. (C2/S43)

With this group of students, then, it was *silence* about political issues that was the common response. While in the South African context, especially before 1994, this may at first seem anomalous, there are several possible explanations for it. The first once again highlights the danger of defining oppressed groups as constituting a collective, homogeneous subject identity and assuming that political discrimination will automatically result in active commitment to changing social conditions. Some students have no interest in political involvement and their silence on the issue can be explained in these terms. A second reason could be that early in their first academic year, students are pre-occupied with academic procedures and requirements so

other interests emerge later. Thirdly, it is possible that, despite attempts to encourage students to be completely free about their intentions, some resisted exposing interests which they perceived as potentially prejudicial and responded to the writing task by providing answers they thought would be considered acceptable to their course tutors. Ellsworth's (1989) observations about the dangers of making assumptions about the reasons for student silence is relevant here, as students could also well have been choosing what to reveal and to whom rather than necessarily signalling either fear, ignorance or a lack of interest in political activities. Fourthly, it could be that some students understood the task to be focusing on academic activities at the expense of others. This, however, seems unlikely in the light of the significant number who mentioned, for example, sporting activities.

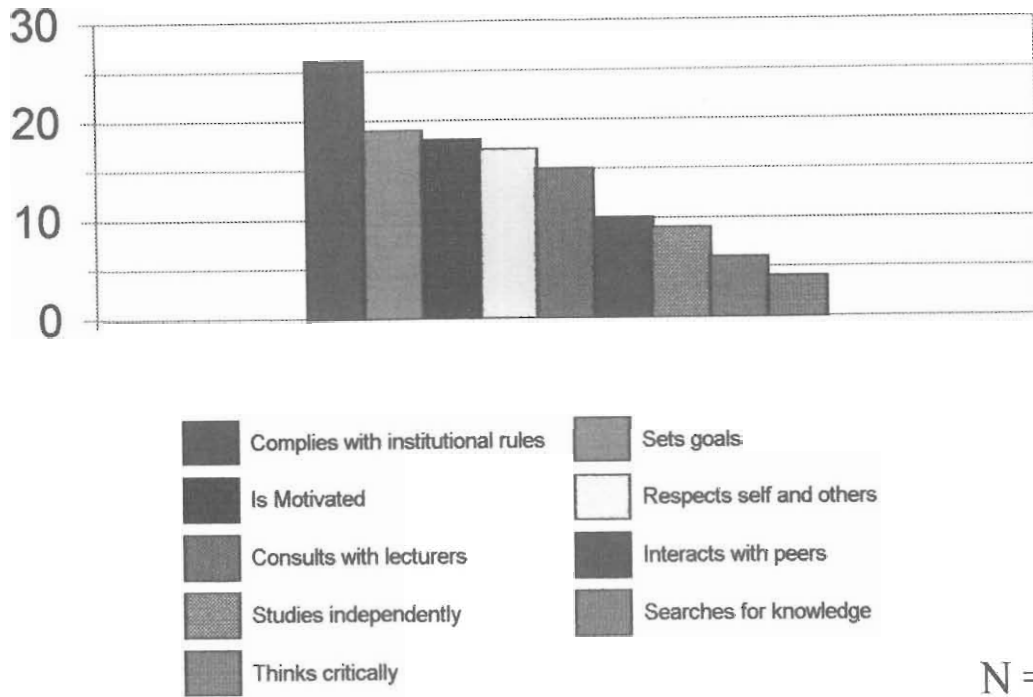
#### **6.4.2.4 The Constitution of a “Good Student”**

Another strand which feeds into this collective narrative, and is closely linked to the initial positioning of themselves at the university, is the students' perception of what constitutes “a good student” (See Appendix D, question 2).

As part of a process of reflecting broadly on their school experiences, they were asked to write a paragraph beginning with the words “a good student is someone who . . .”. As Figure 4 indicates, the dominant characterising feature of a good student was the ability and willingness to comply with a range of demands made by the institution (Foucault 1970b). These responses clustered largely around questions of attendance at all lectures, completion of every assignment within specified times, the necessity always to be punctual and general obedience in relation to the demands of lecturers. This extract illustrates this trend well:

A good student is someone who obeys the school, university, college regulations and rules or rules of any other type of such institutions. By being obedient I believe that particular student will encounter less problems as compared to some other disobedient students. (C2/S33)

## Figure 4: Characteristics of a Good Student (February)



A later tutor evaluation spoke of this compliance in terms of student subordination. In describing her general impression of the students' writing she noted

their apparent acceptance of a subordinate role, a blind gratitude for the opportunity of coming to varsity, their intention of excluding close friends in their lives in case they disrupt studying.

A strong trend often linked to the question of compliance was the need for good students to have respect for themselves and others, including the teaching staff. One student insisted that it is essential that

a good student must have good relationship with his authority (i.e. teachers) not only his teachers even to his fellow colleagues, he must try to create that mutual relationship by sharing his views with other students and be willing to accept other people's ideas, to respect other people's dignity. (C2/S13)

Other trends which emerge here were the importance of frequent consultation with lecturers and peers and the capacity to work independently, with motivation and perseverance. The notion of good students as critical, potentially oppositional thinkers did not emerge as a strong trend in this data and when it was mentioned, it was difficult to infer precisely what the students meant by “critical”. Respondents generally constructed “good students” as being hard working, diligent and, for the most part, compliant. Even in the context of interacting with the teaching staff, “good students” emerge as largely passive, often respectful respondents in the teaching/learning process.

This section of the programme also included discussion around the differences between individual student’s school experiences and the construction and enactment of the role plays described above. It ended with a comparison between school and university and a lengthy discussion of the various ways in which the university divides its social space. By the time students considered *The January Mail*, therefore, they were beginning to be aware of the importance of accounting for the social and political context of any institution and had also considered the extent to which their own responses were shaped, for example, by social and parental expectations.

### **6.4.3 Defining the University through its Discourses**

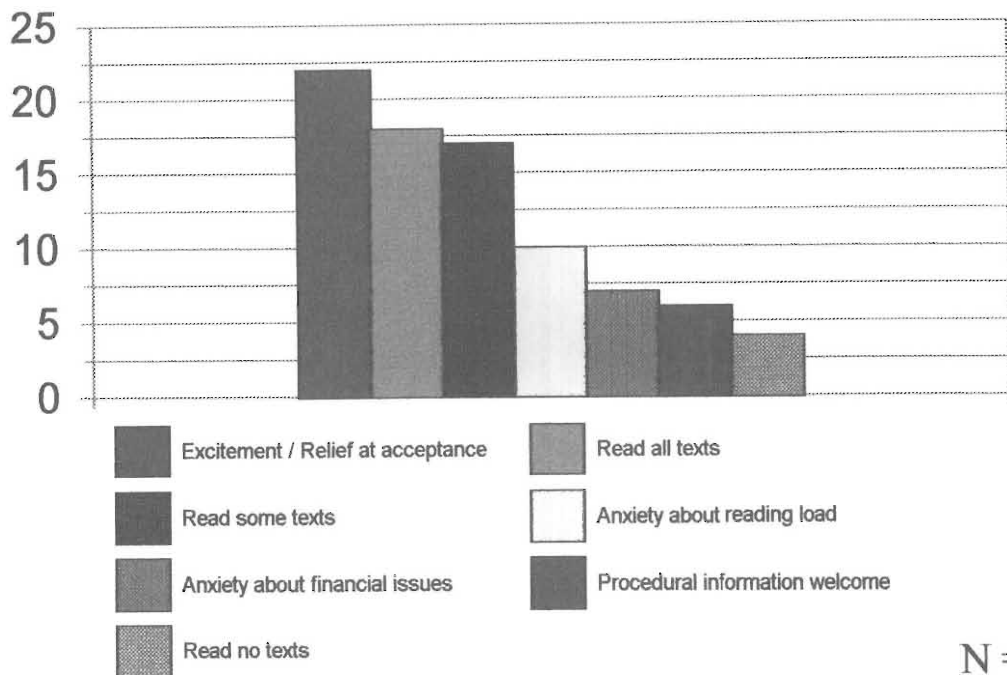
#### **6.4.3.1 The “January Mail”**

For this task, each student was provided with a complete set of the texts issued at the beginning of the year. This served to remind them of the number and range of documents they had received and of the initial responses they had had. It included the university rule book, a “handy guide” to constructing a degree, information about student fees, sessional dates, accident insurance, registration procedures, maps and Faculty specific information. Also included were an educational and careers questionnaire, the Orientation week programme as well as that for Preparing for University, an orientation programme specifically for black students.



Figure 5 represents students' responses when receiving *The January Mail* (see Appendix E (i) question 2)

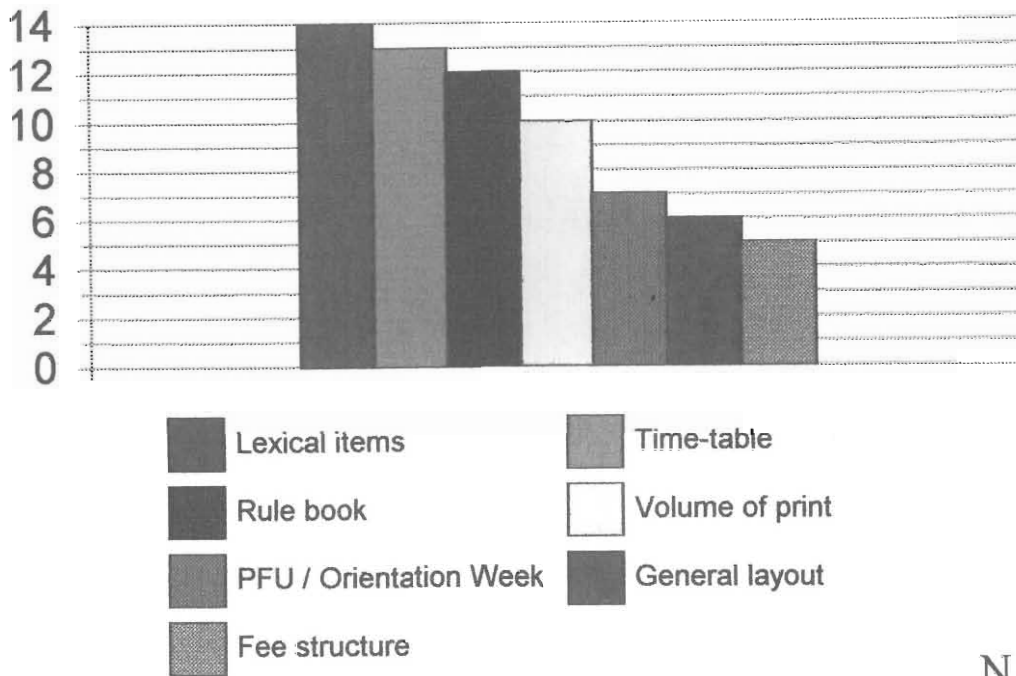
**Figure 5: Response to "The January Mail"**



Responses ranged from one who “thought it was not important to me” (C2/S2) to another who indicated that “my body shaked and I was afraid to open the package” (C2/S8) and another who “felt very elated and felt expected something quite unique” (C2/S26) with the large majority expressing excitement and relief at being accepted into the university. An overwhelming majority of students read either all or some of the texts (see Appendix E(i), question 4) with many indentifying a range of difficulties they had in processing them (see Figure 6).<sup>50</sup>

50. One of the weaknesses in the structure of this questionnaire is that it did not directly address the difficulties of those students who had read only some of the texts. In questions 6b and 8, however, some of their difficulties did emerge and Figure 6 includes a representation of these.

**Figure 6: Problems Encountered Reading "The January Mail"**



N = 23

As Figure 6 indicates, a significant number of students explicitly linked initial excitement to anxiety about processing the large volume of print. While the specific difficulties mentioned by students included problems understanding particular terminology, confusion between *Preparing for University* and *Orientation Week*, and difficulty understanding the relationship between the various student organisations, they tended to cluster around the demands of reading the time-table and the complexities of the University Rule Book. One student's response serves as a representative sample of several comments:

In the book of rules, some of the details are repetitions and lengthy. It would help to summarise the whole booklet. The style of writing is also a problem, it reminds me of some legal documents like government gazette. The writer is so rigid that the reader gets bored by all the details and routine . . . The booklet entitled student fees is also written in the fashion of the Rules Book. There are parts in both booklets that emphasise that a student will be excluded from 'varsity if he doesn't

pay up or comply with the rules. It's as if one is coming to Robben Island like school. (C2/S37; Case Study Two Q: 6)<sup>51</sup>

Of the texts which students recalled with particular clarity (see Appendix E(i), question 5c), three will be mentioned here. The first two, which were the focus of five students, are those pertaining to pre-university courses and here, potentially conflictual positions emerged. One student, for example, was concerned about the exclusion of white students from Preparing for University. For her

PFU really made me wonder. I thought it was for everybody but when I learnt it was for Blacks only, I got worried. I feel it should be for everyone so that we can learn about the history of the university where Blacks are concerned, together. (C2/S6; Case Study Three R: 6)

Another student focused on the Orientation Week programme indicating that “It is not suited for Blacks it is suited for Whites only. The things which are done during the orientation week are enjoyed by Whites only” (C2/S16; Case Study One P:7).

The relationship between Preparing for University and the more traditional Orientation Week (see Appendix E (iii)) is a particularly vexed and extremely important one in the context of a university engaged in a process of transition. For the past eight years, there have been various attempts to merge the two programmes but the discourses which mark the two perspectives have never, until recently, found sufficient common ground to attempt the merger. Now, broad consensus about the need to offer a single orientation programme for first year students in conjunction with financial constraints are contributing towards the urgency of the matter and from 1998 only one orientation programme will be offered.

The third text is the university rules, which had caused difficulty for several students and was, unsurprisingly, the special focus of four students. Here too, sharply opposing opinions about the

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51. The second of these references is a cross reference to the case studies. All direct quotations from these are indicated using the letter of the appendix and the page number.

value of the Rule Book emerged. One respondent clearly constitutes himself as an obedient institutional subject (Foucault 1970b).

I read the university rules well and they still stand out in my mind. Why? Because I wanted to know them very well and did not want to break a single one. I did that because I want to complete my degree without any trouble. (C2/S24)

Another response evidences the early emergence of resistance to institutional discourse:

The university tends to be put in light of being unnecessarily strict, rigid and non-compromising. It goes like this: you get excluded (euphemism for expelled) if you don't do what we want. It puts worries in one's head. Questions such as, will I be able by all times be right in what I do, form in our heads. It doesn't in any way help bolster the confidence and attitude of student. (C2/S37; Case Study Two Q: 7)

The last question students were asked was, "What did this package make you think the university expects of students?" (see Appendix E(i), question 12). The general trend in responses to this highlighted students as being expected to "co-operate" (C2/S19) and to show a "willingness to comply with all the rules. And also willingness to pay money and to work hard" (C2/S35). For only one respondent did the university play a more powerful, manipulative role, "The university expects students to fall in with established structures - they have no say in structuring them" (C2/S15).

When these responses are considered as a whole, several observations can be made. The first, which frames those that follow, is a consideration of the extent to which applicants are in fact *expected* by institutions to read all the information. Some of the texts (for example, the rule book) belong to a genre which has as one of its features the "small print". Some of these documents then, involve the legal codification of what prospective applicants are already presumed to know. In other words, those students who have already been interpellated into these genres (in the South African context usually the native speakers of English), would know that they are not required to read everything and, as a result of this knowledge, would process the documents relatively

easily and quickly while students who have had no access to this genre can be expected to have greater difficulty processing such texts.

Fairclough's (1992c) analysis of "A Cardholder's Guide to Barclaycard" is relevant to this discussion. In it, he illustrates how the text operates as an example of "constitutive intertextuality" (1992c: 114); it is constructed as a hybrid text, combining the discourse of advertising with that of "financial regulation" (1992c: 115). As such, it positions its readers in a double and contradictory way, attempting to both "sell" the concept while at the same time highlighting the legal obligations involved. It can be argued that *The January Mail* operates in a similar way; although the texts constituting it can be analysed separately it can also be viewed as a whole in which similar kinds of double positioning are evident. On the one hand its broad aim is to continue to sell the university to new students by welcoming them and familiarising them with the institution, while on the other it also contains information which is comparable to financial regulation discussed by Fairclough.

The second observation is that it is clear that students' approaches to accessing this package of texts varied widely, with some able to set reading objectives, prioritise and select, and others approaching the texts in a random and confused manner and feeling overwhelmed by the mass of text to be processed. This problem needs to be approached from several angles. In the first place, it may be that only absolutely essential texts are sent in the initial posting and others, those advertising pre-university courses, for example, mailed at a later date. This would not obviate the linguistic difficulties experienced by some students but it would serve to control the volume of text with which they are confronted and implies that, potentially at least, each text may be accorded more attention and that students may be more able to process fewer texts more efficiently.

The third consideration (which is linked to the question of access to a range of genres) relates to the clearly emergent need for the majority of students to acquire the ability to set reading objectives in specific contexts and to learn to prioritise them. In general, this does not happen at school though, once students have enrolled at the university, the whole process of critical reading is addressed in the context of *Learning, Language and Logic*. However, given the extent of the

problems experienced by many students, the amount of time allocated for this is inadequate and needs reconsideration.

The fourth factor which compounds students' difficulties and is directly related to the issues discussed above, is the linguistic construction of university texts.<sup>52</sup> The use of specific and unfamiliar, university-based terminology is often unavoidable but a glossary of the most commonly cited difficult terms would go some way towards addressing this problem. The linguistic density of the texts and unnecessarily convoluted constructions requires separate consideration and needs to be addressed with second language speakers in mind. This is not to imply that all university texts should share a common style or register, but rather to acknowledge that a wider range of considerations about the potential readership of the texts needs to be borne in mind.

This suggestion should be read in conjunction with recommendations made to the University of Natal by the Schreiner/Crossman Commission (1993). The commission was set up to examine the co-ordination of admission procedures to the university "from a student's first enquiry until registration is complete" (1993: 1). It made numerous and wide ranging recommendations for improving accountability, streamlining and communication between different sectors of the university. Included in these was the suggestion that "there is the need for a rigorous review of all the literature to ensure that illusions and incorrect perceptions are avoided" (1993: 19). While the results of this research do not focus on the "illusions and incorrect perceptions" referred to here, nor on the outmoded and "misleading information" (1993: 20) contained in some of the university documents sent to students, it is nevertheless crucial that insights gained through this research be fed into this and other, similar projects currently being undertaken as the university attempts to re-define itself in rapidly-changing and fluid social conditions.

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52. This brief discussion should be read in the light of the more detailed analysis of responses to specific texts considered in Cycle One.

## **6.4.4 Comparison of Reading Texts**

### **6.4.4.1 Analysis of Texts A and B**

This task, which is more deliberately focussed on linguistic choices in the texts (see Appendix G) stands as a bridge between the tutorials which dealt with students' lives and their initial responses to the university and the more focussed CLS tutorials which focus explicitly on discrete linguistic structures (6.2.3.2.). The analysis below is based primarily on Fairclough's model for CDA (1989; 1992c; 1995a and see 3.4.2) which includes Halliday's categories for describing the Context of Situation (see 3.5.2) and also on Thompson's analysis of ideological processes (see 3.3.3.3.). It is provided here as a backdrop to the students' responses to the texts and as a point of comparison. It is also included to show the extent to which these models informed the construction of the questionnaire. It is also important to acknowledge that my interpretation is intertextually related to and influenced by students' responses.

An understanding of the broad conditions of production and reception of this text can be enhanced if viewed within the framework of Fairclough's explanatory dimension. The text is clearly shaped both by the power relations of the university and also more broadly by the South African context. Apartheid South Africa in 1989, significantly before the first democratic elections in 1994, is the key defining feature of its socio-historical context. It was produced at a time when, despite certain relaxation of the most stringent laws, many of apartheid's repressive structures were still enforced. The grossly inadequate educational provision for black learners, which was constantly reinforced more broadly by continued discrimination in social, political and economic domains is most relevant here. This meant that black students entered the university defined not only by their relative lack of personal and institutional power as first years, but also because of the legalised discrimination which positioned and constructed them so negatively in their broader social domain. The fact that these students were required to communicate in English which is their second, or even third language, simply served to exacerbate their position further.

An analysis of the processes of production and reception includes a consideration of the Context of Situation which involves discussion of Halliday's categories of field, tenor and mode of

discourse. As discussed in 5.4.2.3 the field of discourse of this text is predominantly the promotion and advertisement of a specific service for first year students, particularly black, second language speakers. This, however, is presented against the backdrop of other information, which focuses on difficulties students are likely to experience in the context of the university. These difficulties, most especially those pertaining to independent study and the volume of reading required, are naturalised (Thompson 1984; 1990). Its tenor is “collective authorities” addressing first year students who could benefit from an academic reading course. The ideal reader here would be a student who was troubled by the impending reading difficulties and sufficiently convinced by the evidence presented to sign up for a reading course. The informal, personal presentation of helpful experts is offset by a clear articulation of asymmetrical power relations which entail significant social distance between the participants. A colloquial, conversational style characterises its mode. The text functions to both persuade and to caution and attempts to do this by presenting a well founded argument based on the experience of many other students.

In its field, tenor and mode, the hybrid nature (Fairclough 1992c; 1995a) of this text is clearly evident. As was noted in 5.4.2.3., it functions both as an advertisement, thus attempting to convince the “consumer” student about the benefits of a product and as a more authoritative, informed university voice backed by expert knowledge about student difficulties, particularly as they apply to second language students. This results in ambivalent, contradictory positioning of the students in the text. As consumers, they are positioned as a group which has, potentially at least, some “bargaining” power. As “deficient” readers, however, they are unfavourably positioned as incoming “juniors” who are likely to fail.

The negative positioning of the students is even more apparent when specific linguistic features of the text (Fairclough’s descriptive dimension) are analysed. Prefaced by the implication that time is already running out (“While there is time to do something about it”), the rather threatening headline **HOW ARE YOU GOING TO COPE WITH YOUR READING LOAD?** frames a context in which a new student is constructed as a person who has “mistaken” ideas, who cannot “cope effectively” and ends up “floundering badly”. The combined effect of these lexical choices underscores the impression that first year students have little control over their



new environment and that they are likely to be totally swamped by the demands made of them. Interestingly, the “problem” here is located within the student group - as the constructed “other”, the inadequacies belong to them rather than, for example, to the schooling system from which they have emerged or to the university into which they are entering. These problems, according to the author of this text, are even more serious in the case of second language speakers. This is textually achieved in a variety of ways. Firstly, it is explicitly stated that “students for whom English is not their first language” will find reading a “serious problem”. This is emphasised further by underlining the sentence referring to second language speakers. In fact, aside from the underlined sub-headings in the text, this is the only sentence highlighted in this way. In addition, the sequencing of the information is significant. It follows immediately after the reference to “floundering” students and so, for the reader, is conceptually part of the same process.

The complementary ideological processes of what Thompson (1984; 1990) terms *unification* and *fragmentation* are also evident here. Until this point, first year students have been unified (to the extent that they are newcomers to the university), but separated from the rest of the university community, the senior students (who presumably have “coped” with their reading “load”) and certainly from the authoritative experts who help to rectify student problems. Now, however, there is division and fragmentation within the first year group, as the second language speakers are fore-grounded as having particular, additional difficulties.

The choice of pronouns in this text also serves to position students. While the author of the text chooses “they” when referring to students’ experience generally, he opts for the more personalised “you” to refer to this particular group of first years. This choice functions at two levels. On the one hand, it serves to individualise students, to indicate special concern for particular problems and to create a special service in a congenial, informal context. On the other, it serves to underscore the inadequacies of particular subjects, to place them under critical scrutiny and to further highlight their “otherness” in the university context. This, in conjunction with the expert “we” which refers to the members of the Language and Reading Centre staff, in fact increases the social and academic distance between the two groups. Once the impact of the authoritative modal “can” in “we can help” has been included in the total meaning, the asymmetrical relationship between the groups is starkly drawn. A text which was intended as a

friendly attempt to encourage struggling students to enrol for a reading course, is, ironically, one which perpetuates the unequal (and discriminatory) relationships of the South African society at large.

As described in 5.4.3.3, the second version of this text (referred to as Text B in this task) was produced as a result of student comment and criticism. It shares with its predecessor (Text A) the same conditions of production and reception and to some degree similar processes of production and reception. The field of discourse remains the same and the participants are the same. However, there has been a shift in the *relationship* between the speaker and the writer. The threatening undertone of the headline in Text A has been replaced with a far less anxiety-provoking statement while patronising lexical choices which positioned students negatively in text A have been excluded. Students no longer have “the mistaken idea” but instead “often think”; reference to possible difficulties with the volume of required reading and the need for independent study is retained but they are no longer constructed as “floundering” and there is no specific focus on second language speakers. The congenial personalised “you” has been replaced by the more collective, distant “they” and the expert, somewhat over-eager “we” is now represented as the “The Language and Reading Centre”. The authoritative voice of the university reading experts therefore remains, but the power relations have nevertheless shifted slightly. There is certainly social distance between the participants but is no longer the chasm that it was in Text A - first year students are no longer swamped, ill-informed and floundering. They are no longer divided amongst themselves and, although they retain their “otherness” as newcomers, they are accorded a dignity as adult learners that was denied them in Text A.

In Text B the students are not only positioned more positively but also less ambivalently. The primary reason for this is that the advertising discourse type so clearly evident in the first version, is no longer present. The students are no longer constructed as potential consumers; although students are being encouraged to enrol for a reading course, there appears to be no attempt to “sell” a commodity and therefore no further need for the somewhat forced and over-personalised lexical choices which mark the tenor of Text A. It is this, in conjunction with the exclusion of “deficit” lexical choices that result in a clearer positioning of students. The ambivalent “double-positioning” has disappeared; this text is now more typical of a university information sheet and

the subjects are primarily positioned as first year students who are only marginally potential consumers of a product.

#### **6.4.4.2 Student Responses to Texts A and B**

While the analysis below does quantify key information from this task, the primary concern is now on extracts directly from student writing. This is due to a shift in emphasis to a more specific focus on linguistic features of the texts and the consequent necessity to consider student responses in these terms. It is interesting to note that although discrete linguistic features are not explicitly categorised in the task (nor frequently by the students) many responses nevertheless reveal considerable sensitivity to linguistic structures, and, more specifically, to precise lexical choices.

Students had little difficulty answering question 1a (see Appendix G), which was intended to focus their attention on specific pronouns and lexical choices so that the attitude of the writer was more easily identifiable. When asked specifically about this, (see Appendix G, question 1b), twelve of the thirty-seven respondents failed to answer the question and instead summarised some of the content of the document. Opinion amongst the remaining twenty-five students was divided, with nine feeling that the writer was sympathetic and “kind and appealing to students” (C2/S34) and fourteen that his attitude was “undermining” (C2/S41) and “negative” (C2/S39). On the positive side, one student found the focus on the “mistaken ideas” of students an indication of a sympathetic attitude which had considerable cautionary value while others construed his attitude in an extremely negative light. This respondent rather haltingly attempts to capture the modality expressed in the text:

He has a negative attitude -- what he says about students is sometimes not true but the way he puts it, it is as if he is certain that what he says is true. He takes students as people who don't know anything about university. (C2/S8)

Another student highlighted the potential to flounder stating that the writer's attitude "degrades someone's self-esteem because you are also new so you feel you are part of that many which are going to flounder" (C2/S36; Case Study Four S: 13).

When asked to comment on the **difference** between the attitude expressed in Text A and that in Text B (see Appendix G, question 1d), students appeared to understand the question more clearly and twenty-three of the thirty-seven respondents perceived the attitude of the writer of Text A far more negatively than that in Text B. One respondent focussed on the general tone of the text and constructed the difference in terms of a perceived threat to students:

The attitude of Text A is negative and threatened. It makes them to lose hope even before they started. In Text B the students are advised rather than threatened and they are made aware of what sort of work they will experience. (C2/S43)

Another made specific reference to the power of the writer to influence readers:

In Text A the writer uses power relations. Text A has appeared as if there are difficulties at university that are not easy to overcome. Text B is calm. It encourages students to feel free to come at university. (C2/S8)

The pessimistic and, for some, undermining and offensive nature of Text A was also mentioned. These two comments provide examples of this perception:

Text A exhibited a very pessimistic outlook on students' ability to cope with reading matter at university. Text B emphasises the difference it would make to be a good reader at university, drawing attention subtly to the help that is available to attain such a desirable quality. (C2/S15)

In Text B the author doesn't use offensive words like flounder, he is euphemistic and rather careful in the usage and choice of words. (C2/S37 Case Study Two Q: 14)

One student, although she doesn't specify the precise lexical items used, picked up different levels of modality in the texts:

In Text A the writer uses words that made us think that he is positive of what he is saying about students (he is certain that what he's saying is true.) In Text B he uses polite words and they make us think that he is not positive about what he is saying . . . He is not too sure. (C2/S16; Case Study P:14)

When students were asked which representation of students they preferred, their responses were again overwhelmingly in favour of Text B. The comment below summarises the general opinion well:

Text B, being a 1st year student at 'varsity is a nerve wrecking experience. One feel lost, confused and really flounder but I think people who write text that are part of the January mail should be careful as not to contribute in planting fear, anxiety, worry etc in students. They must realise the delicacy and sensitivity of 1st years. (C2/S37; Case Study Two Q:15)

In terms of the preferred heading, there was an overwhelming preference (22 students) for Text B which was closely linked to the more positive image of students mentioned above.

Question three of this task required the students to consider the choice and impact of different pronoun use. While text A most often uses the personal and implicitly singular "you", the writer of text B chooses the collective, more distant and impersonal "they". Of the thirty seven respondents only seven indicated a preference for the use of "you". One student felt that it was "closer and more friendly" (C2/S9) while another said

I believe that "You" is the best reference because if you say "they" you are referring to students generally. Reference "You" to me makes the student feel concerned, as an individual about the whole idea. This reference is direct to each and every student. (C2/23)

It was precisely this general reference to students, however, that was preferred by the vast majority. Thirty respondents shared the view that the use of "they" was a more acceptable choice. The most frequently cited reason was that this prevented students from feeling singled out as experiencing particular difficulties. This comment summarises the view of many:

I prefer the second text because, they in my opinion means you won't be alone but there are many who will find difficulty too. If we take the situation as general, you won't feel threatened alone but each and everyone will have their share of threat. So if all of you are faced with the same problem it becomes easier to solve because all of you will come out with suggestions and personal opinion. (C2/S36; Case Study Four S: 16)

There are two general observations to be made about this task. The first is that Text B, which formed part of it, was in fact indirectly generated by previous *Learning, Language and Logic* students. The opportunity to utilise student-generated tasks adds a motivating dimension to the exercise as a whole. Students were aware of the role played by other students in the production of this text and that had considerable impact on their interest in the task. A later tutor evaluation of the task provides an interesting perspective on this:

My students found looking at the "Before" and "After" Reading Course texts especially illuminating. Having two options there seemed to open up the debatable issues more complexly and productively than reacting for or against a single text often does. The range of positions adopted by students in terms of what they did/did not like seemed much more diverse than in some other situations. I do not know whether the fact that it was a real text that had really been modified already by students had anything to do with this.<sup>53</sup>

Closely linked to this is the fact that the criticisms of previous students were strongly corroborated by the later group as they compared the "before" and "after" texts. Part of the purpose of the original task (see Appendix A) was to reproduce texts which were more accessible and acceptable to future students and their strong preference for Text B indicates that, in the case of this particular text, this was achieved.

The second important feature to emerge from this data is the crucial role played by context in the construction of meaning and how students position themselves within particular discourses. This was most acutely evident in the student responses to the choice of pronoun in the two texts. In the consideration of power relations, it could be argued that the choice of "you" as opposed to

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53. In the new materials which have been developed, the activity which is based on this task is entitled "The students made a difference" (Macdonald 1998b: 34)

the more formal and distant “they” is the less hierarchical, more “human” term which goes part of the way towards narrowing social distance and, in some cases, has the potential to begin to redefine power relations. It is crucial to remember, however, that the social, educational and political experiences of these students are such that they are likely to have been interpellated as “second class” in a number of spheres which include not only their race but also their native language and their proficiency (or lack of it) in English. Within this total context then, the students read “you” as face threatening and discriminatory and indicate a clear preference for remaining one of a more anonymous group. As Winow points out, “the stigma of difference may be recreated both by ignoring and by focusing on it” (1990: 20) and it is the social context which is the key consideration here. It is only if the precise context of these students is ignored that their response is surprising. Student reactions here underscore Thompson’s (1984) objection that critical linguists tend to read straight from surface linguistic forms to an assumed social reality without providing a systematic account of that reality. Linguistic forms need to be carefully read within a precise and acknowledged context and only then can any linguistically encoded power relations or other connotations be inferred.

#### **6.4.5 Critical Language Study Tutorials**

Because of the wide range of activities involved in this section of the programme which included a significant amount of oral interaction it is necessary, for the sake of cohesion, to provide an introductory descriptive section before analysing student interpretation of a specific text in detail.

There were nine tutorials at the end of the programme devoted to the consideration of the specific linguistic structures. At the beginning of this section students were provided with a summary of the central concepts covered during the first part of the programme (see Appendix I(i)). This was done to remind them that by this stage they had become familiar with several CLS principles, both implicitly and explicitly. Through the construction of dialogues they had discussed the extent to which context influences linguistic variation and specifically the role played by such factors as status, social distance and shared knowledge in the construction of asymmetrical power relations. In *The January Mail* exercise they had considered authorship and purpose of texts

while the central features of CLS had been introduced during a brief lecture (see Appendix F(ii)). They had also, especially in the comparative “reading course” exercise, become aware, largely implicitly, of the notion of positionality, the impact of lexical choice on the construction of meaning and the shifts of relationship realised in the choice of pronouns. They were therefore in a position to consider discrete structures from a critical linguistic perspective.

As noted earlier (see 6.2.3.2) the linguistic constructions selected for the language tutorials were modality, the active and passive voice, the article and the use of pronouns. The significance of lexical choice and the sequencing of information was also considered, often in conjunction with one or more of the other structures. Students began by dealing with each construction separately and were engaged in a wide range of tasks - reading, discussing, analysing and writing. For each construction they considered social and linguistic contexts (Fairclough 1989, 1992c, 1995a; Halliday 1985; Halliday and Hasan 1989) in which there were clear ideological implications and contexts in which these constructions had no obvious or explicit ideological weight. It was extremely important for students to read and interpret all linguistic constructions within their particular social contexts and to acknowledge that this has a fundamental impact on the construction of meaning that is both partial and multiple. In exercises around passive constructions, for example (see Appendix I(iv)), they discussed the possibility of “ideological silence” and avoidance of accountability implicit in agentless passives as well as the shifts of emphasis involved in the conversion of an active to a passive construction and vice versa.

Once students had considered this range of linguistic structures, they completed the section by analysing one of two texts using any insights they had gained in the programme to date (see Appendix K). Each text, one from Residence Rules and the other from the student newspaper *Nux*, had been part of other exercises so was not totally unfamiliar to students. The written responses, however, are the work of individuals. For the sake of brevity, only the text most frequently chosen by students will be analysed here.

The text below, which is an extract from the Malherbe Residence Rules generated a wide range of responses from students, and, once the written task had been completed, extremely heated discussion.



B. HELPFUL INFORMATION

1. Security

1.1 Doors

WOMEN STUDENTS: Doors to the Women's Residence are locked promptly at 11.30 p.m. Monday to Saturday, and at 11.00 p.m. on Sunday. A late leave key is issued to women to let themselves in after hours, but this privilege may be withdrawn if used irresponsibly.

MEN STUDENTS: The front door is locked at 10.30 p.m. but unrestricted entrance is available through the basement door.

IF YOU ARE OUT AND ANY DIFFICULTIES ARISE, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO TELEPHONE THE WARDEN OR ONE OF THE SUBWARDENS.

Although the emphasis was on the descriptive domain of Fairclough's model, as a framework for their analysis of the text students briefly discussed its field and tenor of discourse (see 6.5.2 for discussion of problems in this regard). It was agreed that its field was a set of information designed for student use, that it also contained a legalistic flavour so that, although presented as information, it was read as a set of rules. Its tenor, once again, is "authorities" and university students. There was no further discussion on the differentially positioned groups of students within the text.<sup>54</sup>

Thirty-three students chose to analyse this text. Their responses can be broadly grouped into three categories - the authority of the text and, by extension, its writer, the different positioning of men and women in the text, and the attention to specific linguistic constructions to achieve particular authorial purposes. In each group, the significance of lexical choices was highlighted.

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54. I have not provided a detailed analysis of this text as I did in the case of the reading texts. This is because students have now been specifically requested to analyse linguistic features and I am relying on their collective resources to provide the analysis.

Thirteen students mentioned the authority of the text and the degree of certainty of the writer, frequently referring to such words as “will”, “are” and “promptly” to substantiate their argument. This response articulates the view of many:

Words used in text A for women students express a greater degree of certainty and authority than is the case of men students . . . The text is written in passive and reeks with authority for women student mainly i.e. students being informed of accepted procedure. (C2/S15)

Four students, however, were strongly opposed to unquestioningly accepting the text as an authoritative statement. This respondent articulated her views particularly succinctly:

As a critical university student, one has to ask some questions about the above statement [the Malherbe Rules] and not just accept it like:

Is it a privilege to issue late night keys to residents at university?

Why is it a privilege for women and a right for men?

Who issued/wrote the statement?

What does the person who wrote this statement benefit from it?

A person may find out a person of power and status, say a male warden, wrote this statement. It is highly possible that this statement was written without the residents' consultation. (C2/S4)

One student spoke more broadly of the text being a performative speech act, the rule in itself: “any text that is regarded as a rule in itself contains an element of authority. The authority expresses the power relationship between the authority and the audience, whom the rules are being directed to” (C2/S44).

Twenty-one students were aware of the unequal gender relations constructed in the text, where, as one student put it, “males have no pinch from the authorities” (C2/S10). The following extracts clearly illustrate this. In the first one, the text is viewed as being one kind of speech act for men and another for women: “To women this article can be regarded as an order but to men, it is or can be regarded as an announcement. It is harsh for women and polite for men” (C2/S23). In the second extract, lexical choices are clearly linked with the effect of the differential positioning of women and men:

In the . . . text from Malherbe Rules the women and men students are positioned differently. To position women students strong words are used like doors locked promptly, withdrawn etc. With male students the doors are just locked so making the issue . . . much softer. For the women students it seems to be a privilege to leave their doors open . . .for male students there is no such privilege . . .the writer puts this as if it's their right. (C2/S5)

The fourth response focuses on broad conceptual differences as well as lexical choices:

The idea behind the text is inferiority of women and superiority of men. This has been encoded in the text so as to retain the status quo but this PRIVILEGE may be withdrawn suggest powerlessness of women . . . and authoritarianistic views concerning them . . . nothing may be withdrawn from men and there is no irresponsibility which may be dealt with as is the case with women. (C2/S17)

The fifth extract emphasises the underlying message intended for the women students: “girls are subtly but strongly discouraged from being out later than 11 p.m by referring to the late-key issued as being a ‘privilege’ with a threat of losing that privilege should the females abuse it” (C2/S20).

In five instances the rules were interpreted, not as a discriminatory and constructed social practice, but as a protective measure underpinned by natural differences between men and women. Three of these responses came from women and two from men. The response below is from a female student:

I think protection is need to women, whereas men are able to protect themselves. If there was unrestricted door even for women I think even rapists would enter while students are asleep. (C2/S7)

For one of the male students the distinction made between men and women was also constructed as natural and protective: “He has shown greater strictness to female than to males. I think it's because he know that people who are easily threatened are females; that's why he wants the doors to be locked in time” (C2/S2).

Eighteen respondents considered the implications of particular linguistic constructions. For one, “The pronouns themselves distances the students from the authoritative figure but you bridges the gap between the student in problems and the warden” (C2/S15), while for another “The use of the pronoun ‘you’ makes the reader to feel included in this statement and to feel as if you are directly spoken to” (C2/S21). Interestingly, this respondent interpreted the use of the pronoun “you” in Text A of the reading course texts (see Appendix G) negatively, indicating that it drew unnecessary attention to students who were experiencing problems. For her, in a potentially face-threatening situation, she would rather be protected by the general “they” while in this context, she has no difficulty being identified as an individual who belongs in the residence. Her change of response here serves to highlight again the importance of context in any interpretation of text.

Five students focused on the use of the passive with one claiming that it was used to “avoid admitting responsibility because some people might not agree with this statement” (C2/S). Two students mentioned problems related to the exclusion of agency in the passive construction, one of them stating that “We don’t know who is responsible for the action. So it is difficult to ask some further information about the Malherbe situation” (C2/S8). For the other “the use of the passive voice helps to remove the stress from whoever locks the doors in the women’s residence . . . the reader . . . end up not knowing who is the real locker of the doors” (C2/S5).

Six students mentioned the use of the definite article, but here it was identified not as a manner of foregrounding one person at the expense of others for ideological reasons but rather as a means of specific identification in the context of a particular residence. As one student put it, “He used ‘the’ for the warden and the subwardens to show he is specific. He is not talking about any warden or subwardens, but specific ones” (C2/S8).

In their analyses of this text, it was evident that students were able to apply a range of critical linguistic insights to it and to construct what were generally well articulated, succinct comments which uncovered the power relations implicit in it. Several later comments made during the evaluation of the programme (see 6.4.6 below) indicated that they had been unable to do this previously and that it was a process valued by many. A tutor’s evaluation of this section of the course highlights this. It is worth quoting at length:

Students have really engaged with these critical language exercises. Using material which has real consequences for their lives certainly enabled them to see the significance of analysing why certain linguistic structures are used in particular contexts, in a way that just using any material would not. I think it also motivated students to master linguistic structures in a way that traditional grammar teaching seldom achieves. They found the collage of texts intriguing . . . I've been getting a bit of feedback in journals on how interesting they've found this stuff. For some students I think the CLS exercises have been a real "AHA" experience in terms of looking closely at linguistic features in a new way. I'm not entirely sure how they're internalising the overall experience, but I feel the continual swing from micro to macro focus is very good, and works, even though it is highly demanding. Using "their" texts definitely succeeds in hooking the students into the tasks. They've been very keen to engage with and debate with the issues underlying this content.

However, it should be borne in mind that this text is relatively simple and that the various linguistic constructions are correspondingly easy to identify. A crucial remaining question is to what extent students transfer their critical linguistic skills to texts which are more difficult to process. This question will be posed again during the evaluation of the programme as a whole.

The most striking feature of this data is the wide diversity of opinion over the interpretation of this text, the multiple ways in which students construct its meaning. While many imply in their written responses that the different subject positioning of men and women is negative, discriminatory and socially constructed, the absence of explicit claims of this nature makes any conjecture about precise student opinion extremely difficult. Varied interests and investments, however, are clearly evidenced, and these, in conjunction with several starkly contradictory interpretations, highlight once again the significance of the notion of the plurality of meaning and the importance of attempting to integrate the diversity of interpretation into the context of a single classroom.

The group dynamic which emerged from this data reveals two broadly opposing views, one which perceives the rules as a protective measure and the other, more dominant perception that they represent gender-based discriminatory practice. From a pedagogical point of view, the teacher is confronted by a number of questions. How, for example, does a teacher deal with a view which may be evasive and displacing of other, more central issues? Are all multiple

meanings equally valid readings? It could be argued that an insistence that discriminatory rules are “protective” avoids confronting dominant patriarchal practice and that students need to be challenged with alternative views. On the other hand, students could be basing their responses on experienced rather than imaginary threats and the teacher also needs to take account of this. What is clear is that students constitute themselves differently within the discourses emerging from the debate around rape. Here, the two constituencies are clear, thus providing the opportunity for cross-group discussion about women’s position and violence against women. Discussion of this kind would open up the possibility of other perspectives for students without attempting to impose consensus on the group.<sup>55</sup>

#### **6.4.6 Student Evaluation of the Programme**

Forty of the original forty two participants evaluated the programme as it was completed at the end of the eighth week of the first quarter. (see Appendix L) Without exception, student response was positive with most students indicating that they had found it interesting and beneficial in terms of the ability to read more critically and sixteen claiming that it was impacting on their understanding and approach to other subjects, most particularly Historical Studies, English and Sociology. These two extracts are representative of the group as a whole:

The Critical Language Study has served many purposes in my studies and generally outside university life. For instance, I have gradually developed a habit of . . . reading with a critical view in any university text. It might be my prescribed text, any critical work from the library and even posters on notice boards. For example I asked myself such questions; who wrote it? Why? And the relationship between myself and the writer. Moreover, how am I positioned by the writer? That is the power relationship, such as the social status and position held. (C2/S12)

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55. Cross-group discussion is an alternative to the formation of Ellsworth’s “affinity groups” (1989: 317) which are small groups formed around the common experiences of marginalised groups which differ from those of other students. They can also be formed to promote an as yet not fully recognised perspective. Affinity groups are often more effective when they are not constructed by the teacher but are formed by the students themselves outside the classroom context.

The Critical Language Studies has taught me not to accept the text as it is written, but to find out who the writer is. To be critical about the language used and to find out where I am positioned as a reader. (C2/S3)

Twelve focussed on the importance of lexical choice, while the notion of context was implicit in several evaluations. This extract is a representative view:

The Critical Language Study have taught me to be aware of the fact that in English, different words are used in different situations when speaking and how writers select words when writing text . . . In Critical Language Study I have learnt that when speaking a language a person must not use any word just because he knows the meaning, sometimes the word might not fit in the message you are trying to deliver. One word can have a number of meanings . . . In tutorials I have learnt to raise some questions and to criticise and to understand words including the level of authority and those indicating certainty in the text. (C2/S45)

From these and many other student evaluations it was clear that the programme was perceived to have been of considerable benefit and in a variety of ways.

#### **6.4.7 Tutor Evaluation**

Many of the tutors' comments about various aspects of the programme have been integrated into other sections of this chapter. The purpose here, therefore, is to provide general comments about the process as a whole and then to include some of the tutors' overall impressions.

Each week, tutors were asked to comment on the progress of the programme and to identify its strengths and weaknesses (see Appendix O). Five of the six tutors were extremely positive about this request and provided me with many insights into its value as well as ideas for possible modification and future development. One tutor indicated that she had "enjoyed the pace and variety of tasks" and noted an extremely high level of attendance in her group. She and two others remarked on the value of early writing tasks, four tutors noted the accessibility of the

materials and three observed a change in the kind and quality of students' journal entries.<sup>56</sup> As one remarked

I've enjoyed it immensely . . . I don't know if it's at all valid to make any correlation but I've experienced my journals quite differently with many of my students. Because of my interest in how they are engaging with this material, I've specifically asked more focussed questions about their learning experiences in general and 3L in particular. I've a number of students who seem far better able to articulate on these issues than in previous years. I wonder to what extent the process we've given them in 3L so far has enabled them to do this?

On a more general level, one tutor felt that both she and her students had "benefited significantly from the introduction of this component, and that it merits permanent integration into the 3L course", while another indicated that "the whole programme, finishing up with the exercise on the two texts and the evaluation sheet and the Ivanič reading, has been coherent and well received.

On the negative side, all the tutors were conscious of pressure of time and three were concerned that the inclusion of this material early in the year could have been at the expense of other urgently needed skills. One tutor said:

I'm not sure if the programme was equally beneficial to all students. My ablest students certainly responded exceptionally well to the CLS material. It stimulated and stretched them according to direct, informal and formal feedback they gave me. But I think some weaker students battled with some sections and I did not pick this up enough at the time.

Of the six tutors, one, who was not responsible for a research group, did not return any written evaluation of the programme at all. In curriculum development meetings she indicated some discomfort with the materials and appeared to be convinced from very early on that her students lacked the linguistic proficiency to manage the programme. When enquiries were made about

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56. During the first six months, students and their tutors exchanged a weekly dialogue journal (see Fulwiler 1987) the purpose of which was to develop the relationship between them and also to give the students an opportunity to write in a context where their writing was simply responded to rather than formally assessed. One of the key features of this process is confidentiality and material from this source (which could have provided extremely rich data) was therefore excluded.



the absence of evaluation forms, her response was only that she did not have the time to complete them. While it is impossible to be certain in the face of her silence, it is reasonable to suggest that this reticence is characteristic of many traditionalists within the university context who prefer to remain entrenched in familiar practice rather than confront the possibilities and challenges of new initiatives. In the case of this particular material, its “political” nature is an additional reason for resistance. The key observation to make here is that whatever the precise reasons for her silence, in the context of CLA, what is left unsaid stands as an evaluation in itself and is therefore a crucial element in the evaluation process.

#### **6.4.8 Post-Programme Workshop**

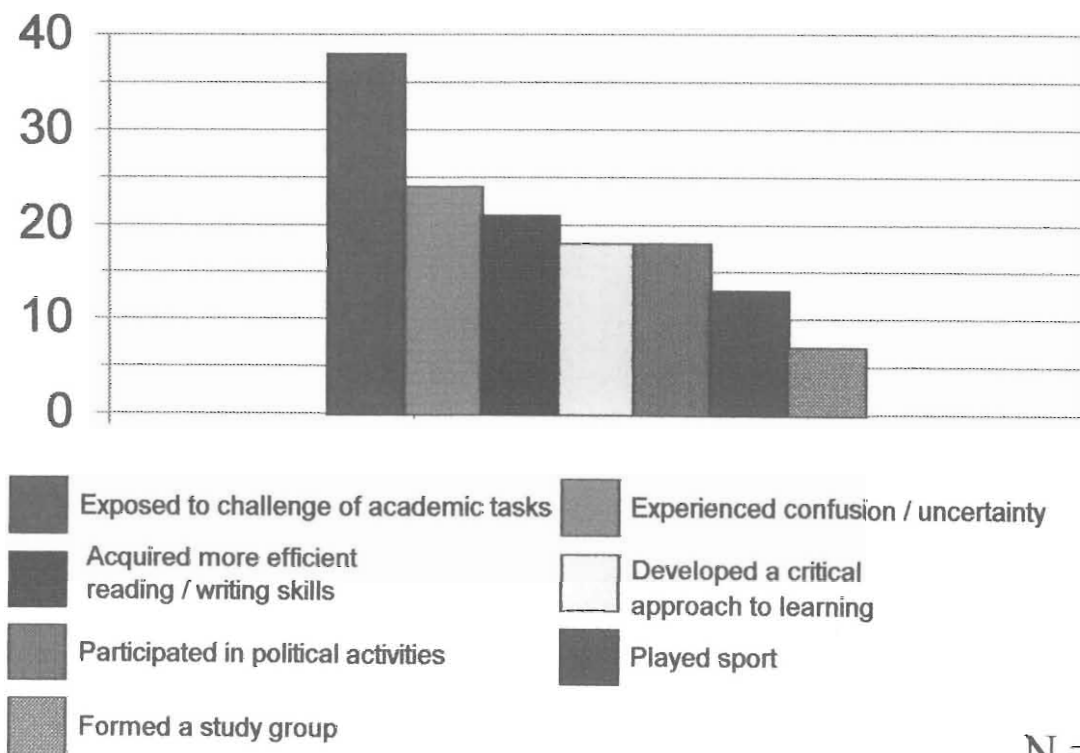
The purpose of the post-programme workshop (see Appendix M), which was held in August, was to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on their first six months at the university and, crucially, to try to identify for themselves any shifts or changes in their perceptions, about their position within the academic environment. Closely related to this was an opportunity to reconsider what constitutes a “good student”. In addition, students were asked to indicate what they had experienced as most valuable at the university and what they considered least beneficial. The workshop was also designed to enable me to identify trends in student perceptions and to consider whether or not the critical language programme had had any impact on these. This aspect of the workshop, then, was part of the overall evaluation of the programme and insights from it need to be considered in conjunction with earlier student and tutor evaluations (see 6.4.6 and 6.4.7). It is important to acknowledge that the causes of any shifts in perception will be attributable to a wide range of stimuli and that, even when students specify the CLS programme as being influential, it remains, at best, one contributing factor among many. A general view of its value, however, impacts on pedagogical decisions regarding its future development and further integration into the *Learning, Language and Logic* curriculum.

During the four hour workshop students were asked to describe what they had done during the first semester and then to indicate what they would like to do as students in the future. They also repeated the earlier task which required a description of what constitutes a “good student”. Once

this section was complete, students were provided with a copy of their earlier responses to the same tasks and required to compare them, to consider the differences between them and to identify the causes of these differences.

As Figure 7 indicates, when asked to reflect on the first six months and to indicate what kinds of activities they had been involved in, all the respondents mentioned some aspect of the academic demands of the university. There was frequently an emphasis on early confusion and difficulties and on the acquisition of a range of necessary academic and communication skills. The importance of efficient reading, essay writing, time management and the confident use of the library were also predominant.

**Figure 7: Activities / Experiences During the First Semester**



In the overall response to academic activities, there was a marked increase in the emphasis on the importance of a more critical approach to learning. At the beginning of the year, only one student positioned himself as being actively involved in critical academic debate and a further four alluded to the importance of active, interrogative engagement with academic material (see Figure 3). By sharp contrast, in this set of data, eighteen students emphasised the importance of critical interactive approach to learning. As one woman student noted: “When I first arrived at this university I studied very passively and rarely took any breaks when I studied but all that has changed” (C2/S6; Case Study Three R: 19). Another observed that “ things like critical analysis of everything on campus is the part and parcel of university education, so it will continue in future at an advanced level” (C2/S39).

One student focused almost exclusively on the acquisition of critical language and reading skills. She noted:

I have learnt to study critically i.e. critical language study. Studying different text written by different people or from different organisations. Through reading these texts I have learnt to find and understand the hidden meaning or message through analysing words, language used, I have also learn how different writers use the language in order to express their feelings and views about something and how they use or choose words in describing people and their behaviour. (C2/S45)

In one case academic activities and critical responses to courses were perceived as being compatible with the university’s Mission Statement:

The university has a mission statement which I feel is very good and it is the means to judge what progress the university has made . . . I would say I have done my best to attend lectures, tutorials, seminars etc and I feel I made my best to use those opportunities effectively and fruitfully by fully participating and co-operating with academics. This is aimed at academic excellence. (Mission Statement) As a student I have done my best in submitting complaints about the university teaching and sometimes I’ve been successful because changes were made even though not all my grievances were attended to. (C2/S17)

The other area of activity where there was a marked difference between the two sets of data was in the realm of politics and, more specifically, student government. While only two students

mentioned it at the beginning of the year (see Figure 3), by August it was of concern to eighteen, five women and thirteen men. Some had already involved themselves in political activities while others were considering future commitment.<sup>57</sup> As one pointed out:

The political activities are vital on campus. We have whites and blacks organising on different premises forming different structures. There is a lot of debate about for example, student representation, national politics, international affairs, and so on. (C2/S 38)

One woman student indicated her decision to become a member of the Residence House Committee because “there is only one black student who is a house committee” (C2/S8) while another had not yet made final choices indicating that she was “evaluating the policies of various groups . . . and I will definitely join one as soon as I’ve satisfied myself with the relevance and applicability of that groups policies” (C2/S13).

One of the two students who had initially indicated an interest in political groups, expressed his continued involvement in terms of the university’s Mission Statement and also tied it closely to his conception of what constitutes a good student:

in the Mission Statement the university is an affirmative action institution. In my resident (WOB) there are many things I have done in challenging the university for this clause . . . I felt like doing it in order to prepare this university for all South African students at large, because I feel it is not yet prepared . . . I would say that all I have discussed is inter-related because it constitutes what a good students should be. This inter-relationship is: the university politics influence university life (social) as well as academic life and content. (C2/S17)<sup>58</sup>

Predictably, not all students entered the political arena with equal enthusiasm. One woman, for example, indicated that she had “tried to be politically educated, as there are many political

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57. Responses to the question, “What kinds of things will you do in the future as a student of this university?” were often integrally linked to the activities undertaken during the first six months. Both questions are directly related to how students position themselves within the university context and at times, therefore, are considered together.

58. The notion of an “underprepared” university (as opposed to underprepared students) has been central to the transformation debate in South Africa (Masenya 1994).

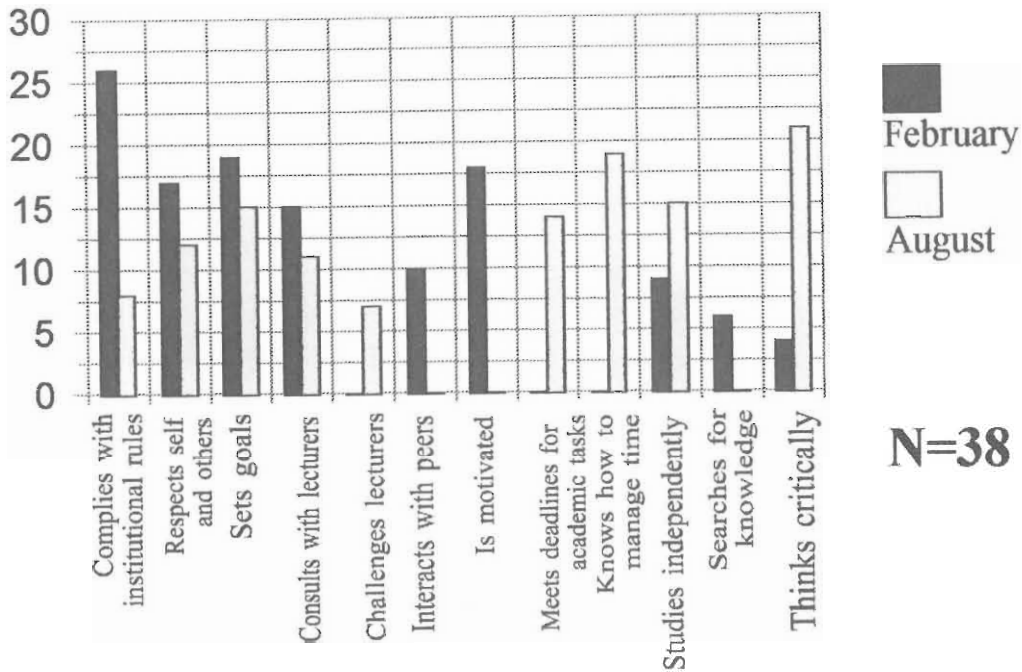
organisations in this campus, but I've failed because I realised that I'm not interested in politics at all" (C2/S16 Case Study One, P:20)

What is noteworthy in these responses as a whole, is a general increase in students' awareness of the importance of a broader range of activities outside those of an academic nature. Although the new emphasis tended to be on political engagement, many students also acknowledged the impact of the experience of the university more generally. As one student somewhat exuberantly put it:

All in all I could say that I was a good student besides being a good student or should I put it this way besides my studies my life as a student has been great. I met all sorts of different people and they have been eye openers to me in some aspects of life I have never experienced. I have been involved in a lot of activities and I enjoyed every minute of it. Being at varsity for the first time has been an amazing experience . . . some things I never thought are possible to achieve I have achieved. These things are getting a first class pass, beating some mother tongue speakers of a language in my first English essay. These things were like a dream to me. (C2/S36: Case Study Four S: 20)

The same shift towards a more active, interrogative stance clearly emerged when the students were asked to repeat paragraphs describing what they considered to be a "good student" (see Appendix M, question 2). While no changes were evident in ten of the responses, Figure 8 clearly indicates that the large majority of students now included some comment on the need to be critical, active and interactive and that the degree of compliance which dominated responses at the beginning of the year was absent. While the centrality of academic activities remained, a new emphasis on active and challenging responses emerged as a clear trend in student perceptions. For the majority, a good student was now not someone who only "attended all lectures" and "obeyed the rules of the university" but, in addition "a good student is someone who study actively . . . is someone who is self-confident . . . someone who is not just a model student but able to be a constructive critic of what is learnt at university" (C2/S9). There was also a shift away from automatic respect for teachers. As one student expressed it: "In the original task I thought a good student is someone who respects her lecturer in order to have a good record. In this morning task I said she must be a critical thinker and manage her time in everything she's doing" (C2/S2).

**Figure 8: Characteristics of a Good Student  
Comparison between February and August**



The ability to view issues from different perspectives, “to look at what he/she is told to do at both sides i.e. critically” (C2/S29), was frequently mentioned, with seventeen respondents mentioning this for the first time. As one student put it:

She must be able to be a critical thinker. By critical thinker I mean she mustn’t take things as they are but she must be able to look on both sides of the given task for example to find out the disadvantages and advantages of what has been said . . . She must to argue. (C2/S2)

There was a clear trend away from unquestioning acceptance of information to a more interrogative stance:

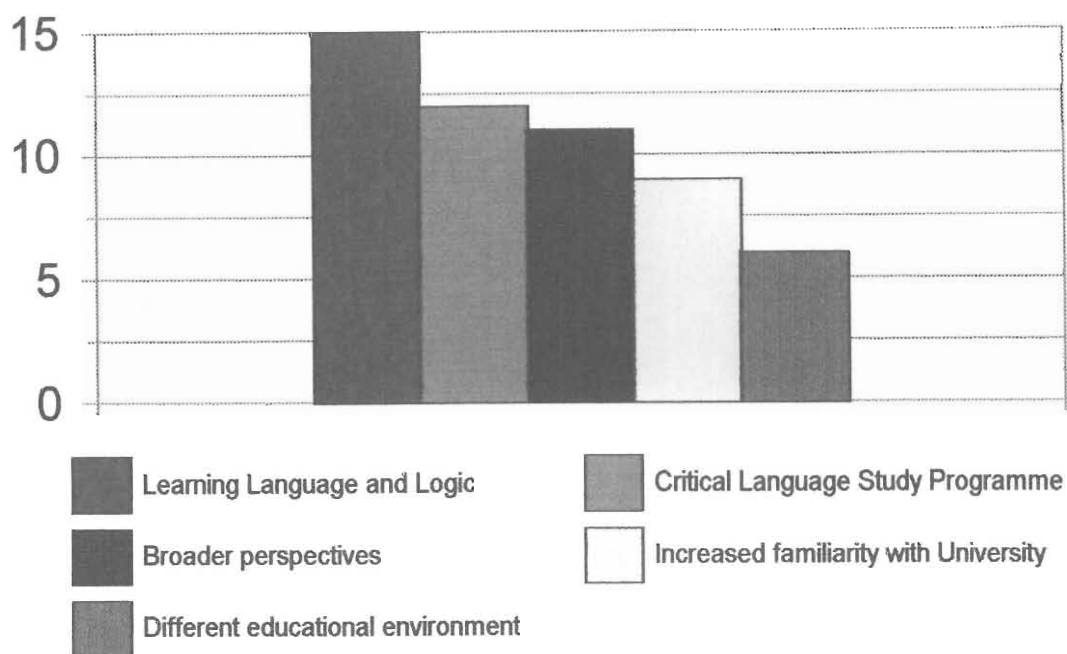
A good student is someone who is able to constructively criticise when there is a need. He/she is a critical person who refuses to be a yes-men but wants an understanding, an in depth one, of anything that come his way. He is a mentally independent person who is open to correction and criticism. (C2/S37; Case Study Two Q: 21)

For five students, a critical approach was closely linked to the current changes in the university as a whole. This link was articulated most forcefully in this comment:

A good student is someone who worries about academic material and teaching that it should address the needs of students and the society. It should also concern a good student . . . that academic excellence is achieved . . . A good student should also pressurise the university for change, that is should be prepared to meet and cater for all the needs of all coming (future) and present student . . . therefore a good student should participate fully and wholeheartedly in structures struggling for all I have mentioned. (C2/S17)

The changes identified by the students can be considered under four broad categories. Nine students identified personal development which included increased self-confidence, more ambition, growing awareness of political and social issues and the ability to mix with people of other races. This was often linked to academic development (mentioned by fourteen students) where a new emphasis on time management and a growing realisation of the role and importance of tutorials was evident. A more critical approach to learning was frequently cited by fifteen as a central change and this in turn needs to be seen in the context of the development of a broadening perspective of what it means to be at university. As one student explained, “in my first response, my focus was largely on the academical part of university, but this morning I balanced the academical, social, political and religious aspects” (C2/S17).

## Figure 9: Factors Contributing to Changes



N = 38

Figure 9 above represents the range of factors identified as contributing to these changes. One of the most frequently cited was growing familiarity with what had, at first, been an extremely unfamiliar and daunting environment. Others located the reasons for changes in a general broadening of their perspective, particularly in the socio-political sphere:

The first reason that I identified is that at first I focused mostly on the academic year 1991 and didn't look that much on the future. That is the first and basic reason for the changes in my versions. Secondly I didn't mention the whole question of involvement in the society's activities . . . but now I feel strongly that it is of great importance more especially at this stage in our country and I also believe it can help a good student to push her/himself because he/she will be aware of his/her disadvantaged background and the demanding future we are heading for. (C2/S33)



Some students mentioned the more progressive educational environment as being a factor in their changed views while one made explicit connections between this and her construction of a “good student”:

About a good student I was not aware that to be a good student mean to share. The main cause of that failure to realise a good student was the way we were working within our schools. Most of the time we were spoon fed as a result we had nothing to share . . . We were not allow to debate on the academic issues, we had to accept what we were told. As a result defending your arguments was not a special issue to deal with. (C2/S20)

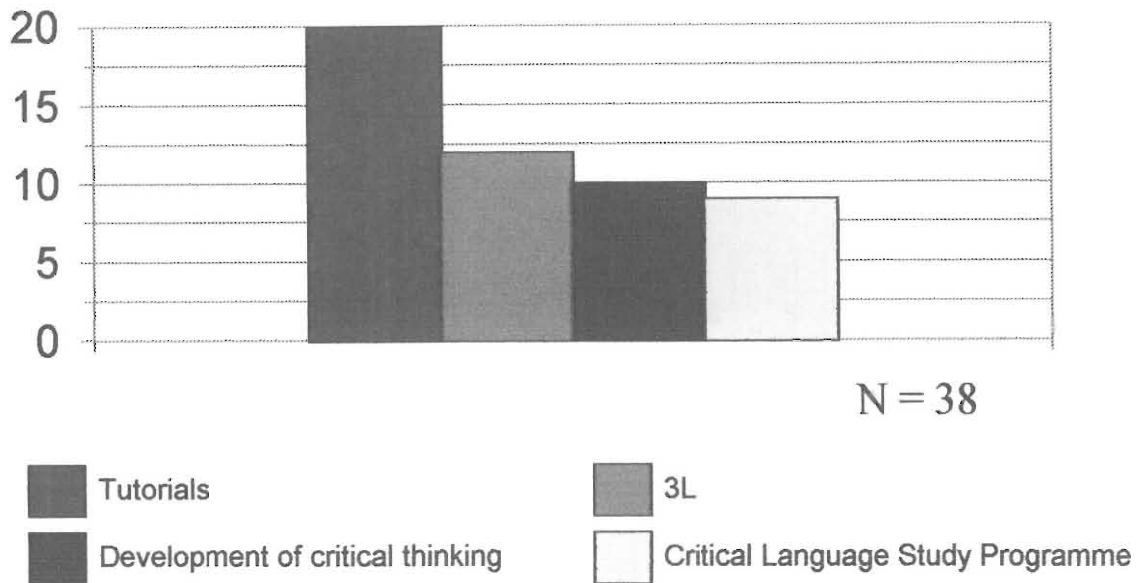
The most frequently cited reason for personal change was *Learning, Language and Logic*. This comment is a typical response: “Doing 3L was so helpful because I learnt about time management, active learning, study skills, analysing and balancing work with socialising” (C2/S10). Many participants specifically mentioned the CLS Programme. As one pointed out: “Through critical language awareness I learnt things I did not know when I first came to varsity and this has encouraged me to view things critically which is something I never did when I first came to varsity” (C2/S6; Case Study Three R: 22). One linked CLA to the development of more efficient reading skills:

The reason for change is that at the beginning I knew nothing about critically studying. The critical language awareness has helped me to know how to read efficiently, come to terms and understand not just passively but to critically analyse and understand it. (C2/S41)

As the final task of the workshop, students were asked to identify the three most and the three least valuable aspects of their university experience (see Figure 10). Of particular interest here is the number of students who identified *Learning, Language and Logic* as one of the most valuable university experiences and here the development of communication skills, reading and essay writing techniques were foregrounded. The importance of critical thinking was mentioned by ten students with seven specifically pointing to the CLS programme. One student indicated that “CLS and analysis has developed within me a more flexible and tolerant attitude and has enhanced a thinking approach towards any problem” (C2/S12). Another viewed the programme

as a source of personal strength, claiming that “Knowing that I critically evaluate information will make people forget about taking advantage of me” (C2/S6; Case Study Three R: 23)

**Figure 10: Most Highly Valued Aspects of University Experience**



On the negative side students cited racial tension as an ongoing problem which permeates many aspects of university life, including student government, sporting organisations, residences and relationships between the teaching staff and students. Other negative responses clustered around academic and social activities. Students particularly mentioned larger tutorials in Economics and Psychology as preventing discussion and being dominated by the tutor. Afternoon lectures, DP requirements and attendance registers were also criticised. At a social level, some students perceived parties and sporting events as detracting from their academic pursuits. One mentioned discrimination against women as a negative factor and another commented that the religious life of students was neglected.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the analysis of the data thus far has indicated trends in student perceptions and has tended to foreground common responses. It would, however, be

inaccurate to suggest that broad generalisations about “what these students think” or worse, “who they are”, can be inferred from this data. One of the fundamental arguments of this thesis is that the humanist view of an essential, unified and unchanging self should be abandoned in favour of the poststructuralist notion of multiple and fragmented subject identities, which are constituted in specific and dynamic socio-historical conditions. The analysis of the case studies which follows clearly illustrates the explanatory power of this view and the importance of including in the analysis the diverse and contradictory responses contained in the data.

## 6.4.9 Diversity and Contradiction in a University Context

### 6.4.9.1 Introduction

The purpose of the analysis of these case studies (see Appendices P-S)<sup>59</sup>, is to focus on multiplicity, diversity and contradiction rather than to identify shared experience or perception. It should be viewed as extending and complementing the content analyses above and also providing a cautionary reminder comment against any temptation to foreground commonality at the expense of difference. The dominant and interrelated analytical categories used here are various modes of intertextuality and the resultant hybrid texts (see 3.3.2 and 6.4.4.1.) and the constitution and location of multiple subjectivities (see 3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2) within different discourses. The term *discourse* is used to delineate the different broad discourse communities from which students draw.<sup>60</sup> These include academic, social, educational (school-based), sporting and religious discourse. *Discourse* is distinguished from the term *account* which is used to refer to the student narratives as they are constituted and re-constituted during the first semester.

It should be noted here that precise identification of discursual boundaries is extremely difficult and somewhat arbitrary, For example, academic discourse here refers to the broad academic

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59. These appendices are full sets of data from each of four students. Some of the data has been typed from original texts and some is in its original form. The typed material is an accurate reproduction of the original texts and includes grammatical errors, corrections and false starts. In the single case where the original text provided evidence of a linguistic process that the typed version did not, the original has also been included. (see Appendix S: 25)

60. For an alternative categorisation, see Fairclough’s use of “discourse type” (1989: 29).

expectations of the university rather than to specific disciplinary sub-discourses while sporting discourse is distinguished from broader social discourse. It should also be remembered that students will inevitably draw on both primary and secondary discourses (Gee 1996) but that these will differ from student to student and may not always be easily identifiable from the data. It may be difficult to ascertain, for example, whether some school-based expectations formed part of the students' primary, home-based discourse or not.

Although these analytical categories will be used as a guide for all the case studies, other features of particular interest, (the emergence or use of a particular linguistic form, for example), which emerge from specific case studies, will also be highlighted. It should be remembered, however, that the purpose of this study was not to identify or evaluate students' linguistic competence or development per se, but to trace their responses to institutional discourse during the first six months of their university life and to consider the extent to which different discourses are accepted or resisted as the students are constituted and constitute and reconstitute themselves in the context of the institution.

#### **6.4.9.2 Case Study One**

This case study records the responses of Nomsa<sup>61</sup>, a Zulu-speaking female student who entered the university at the age of nineteen and registered in the Faculty of Social Science. Having experienced a school in which the standard of education was considered better than the standard of other black schools she says, "So I thought I have to go to university so as to increase the number of educated Blacks. I also realized that the more educated a person is the more privileges that person has"(P: 1). In her first writing task, she positions herself clearly within academic discourse stating that, "The first thing and most important one I will do at this university is to work hard. I don't mean that I will load myself with too much work but that I will work to my ability. Other things will follow" (P: 1). Playing sport and "taking trips" are also mentioned as a means to "refresh the mind"(P: 2) but these activities remain secondary to academic pursuits.

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61. All the names used in these case studies are pseudonyms.

In her paragraph describing a “good student”, written the following day, she draws exclusively from academic discourse, positioning “him” (with the exception of the he/she in the first line, this is a pronoun she uses throughout) as someone who is “dedicated to his work” which “does not have to be correct but . . . has to impress the one marking his work.” Neatness, attentiveness and “Someone who makes his books his friends” complete her first version of what constitutes a “good student”. Although she doesn’t describe the good student in terms of loyalty and obedience as some other students do, the complete absence of any critical dimension results in the foregrounding of a compliant and unquestioning subject and one who is always “eager about his work” (P: 4). Six months later when she looks back on her initial experiences and is asked to identify any changes that occurred in that time, she remains firmly constituted within the same discourse. Her second account of a “good student”(P: 22) still positions students entirely in terms of academic commitment and still with the same compliance. In terms of defining characteristics, there is not even a slight movement towards a critical perspective here, though a shift in her gendered linguistic choices (she moves from predominant “he” in the first paragraph to “he/she” in the second), especially when considered in the light of her analysis of the extract from the Malherbe Residence rules (see Appendix P: 17-18), indicates a new awareness of unequal gender relations and the consequent attempt to represent this linguistically. In terms of her own situation, she identifies tutorials, practicals and tests as being the three most valuable experiences at the university during the first semester (see P: 24) and then, when considering her future role as a student, once again foregrounds academic work, this time specifically excluding the possibility of political activity. Having attempted to be politically educated she concludes, “I’m not interested in knowing about political organisations on this campus” (P: 21).

Given the apparently minimal shifts in this student’s perspectives during her first six months at the university, her evaluation of the CLS programme stands as a discrete and seemingly unintegrated part of her university experience. Here she says:

It has broadened my mind, made me see that when you have something written to you, you don’t have to accept it as it is. You must also look at it critically because there may be some hidden message in it. You must also look at how you are positioned. (P: 19)

There is no evidence that the critical reading processes claimed here have been transferred to other aspects of her university life. The lack of any critical dimension to her construction of a good student or, indeed, to her own positioning within the university, clearly illustrates this. She is an example of a student who enters the university constituted within a particular discourse and six months later remains similarly constituted. While she mentions that she has been “attending Cathsoc on Sundays” and her attempt to “adapt . . . to the situation at this university” there is no significant expansion of her perspectives during this time, nor is a clear emergence of any other intersecting university discourses evident. She specifically resists political discourse and while there are tenuous strands of other discourse types in her writing, none of these emerges strongly enough to dislodge the academic discourse which remains dominant throughout.

#### **6.4.9.3 Case Study Two**

The second case study (see Appendix Q) stands in sharp contrast to Case Study One. It traces the responses and experience of Nathi, a twenty-four year old Zulu-speaking male student who left school in 1988 and worked, first for the South African railways where he experienced “racially discriminatory practises” (Q: 1), and then in a warehouse as a despatch clerk. On entering the university he registered in the Faculty of Arts. In the initial writing task when asked to articulate his role as a student within the university context, he first mentions his desire to “study and pass with flying colours” and then, in the same paragraph, (and as one of only two students to do this at this early stage), he indicates his commitment “to actively participate in struggles waged by the students against university authority”. The second and third paragraphs explain this position further as he notes that “The university claims to be an equal opportunity institution that rejects apartheid but I think that is just window dressing” and indicates his desire to be part of “the progressive forces who work towards making the university genuinely non-racial, non-sexist and democratic”. He also highlights the situation where “We and our fellow white students are still strangers” and his desire to “bridge the gap” between the two groups (Q: 2).

Two days later, this student describes his school experience on the one hand as “instilling a sense of responsibility in me” and placing “realities of life in front of me” and, on the other as being

marked by the presence of “under-qualified and incompetent teachers” who had an “irresponsible and negative attitude . . . towards students” (Q: 3). Possibly conflicting positions are already emerging here but his discourse is even further complicated when, in the same exercise, he describes the key characteristics of a “good student”. Having emphasised punctuality, attentiveness and responsibility, he then insists that “ a good student has above all, respect and love for colleagues and teachers alike” (Q: 4).

Within the space of two days then, he speaks positively of school-instilled responsibility within the framework of what he perceives to be negative, incompetent and irresponsible teachers and of his role as a student waging a “struggle” against the university authorities while at the same time giving primacy to “respect and love” for teachers as a key feature of a “good student”. If these apparent contradictions are explained from a humanist perspective which assumes a unified self, then this student must be constructed at best, as somewhat confused. It may be possible to explain the contradiction partially by positing that “teachers” and “university authorities” are two different groups, each warranting a different response. This separation of authorities from teachers, however, remains speculative and, given the authoritarian school system, unlikely, and still does not begin to account for the unequivocal disjuncture between teachers as “incompetent” and “irresponsible” but nevertheless deserving of unmitigated “love and respect”.

The post-structuralist view of subjectivity in which potentially conflicting, multiple subjectivities are assumed has much stronger explanatory power here. Using this analytical framework, what emerges from these contradictory statements are not necessarily inconsistent and thoughtless positions but at least two subject identities. The student is constituted within two distinct discourses and the consequent and contradictory subjectivities become dominant in different specific contexts. When this student positions himself oppositionally as a student activist, he is located within political discourse, and, more specifically, the discourse of apartheid South Africa’s student politics. In this context, contesting “the university authority” is central to his identity. When he constructs himself as a “good student”, other, “more passive” characteristics are foregrounded. Given the rigid educational structures which typify black schooling in apartheid South Africa, this construction is not surprising, but his “double”, and starkly contrasting, positioning of teachers nevertheless needs to be accounted for. The “incompetent”

teachers at school are hardly compatible with those to whom “respect and love” should be proffered. It could be that, as a new member of the university community, this student is unwilling to express his perceptions about university teachers but it is more likely that, given the varying educational contexts, teachers are constructed differently and he has positioned himself differently in relation to them. His particular constructions are fundamentally shaped by some aspects of school experience,<sup>62</sup> by parental and social expectations and, during the first weeks of the academic year, by a range of unfamiliar and often anxiety provoking experiences.<sup>63</sup>

There is a strong relationship between the intertextuality of this student’s text and the subject identities which emerge from it. The dominant mode of intertextuality is what Fairclough terms “sequential intertextuality” (1992c: 118) where different discourses (or what he terms “discourse types” 1989: 29) alternate within the text. In his initial written “positioning” exercise, this student constructs a hybrid text yet he separates academic from political discourse, clearly seeing the two domains in distinct and, at this stage, easily recognisable terms. Each is marked not only by spatial and sequential separation within the text but also in lexical terms with choices such as “to study and pass with flying colours” characteristic of the former, and the “progressive forces” and the “waging” of “struggles” typical of the latter. The fact that a “student” is different from an “activist” is further substantiated by his “good student” text which can be described as a sub-discourse of academic discourse. For this student, a “good student” is, “punctual . . . works extremely hard . . . attends all his classes . . . critically analyses his work and is not a parrot or a computer” (Q: 3-4). As such “good students” are located entirely within the domain of academic activity to the exclusion of the activities so strongly foregrounded in his initial self-positioning exercise.

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62. It should be noted that for many students, other aspects of their educational experience bring about different, more militant and oppositional characteristics. This can also be observed in some students who are generally reserved in the classroom context but, in the face of a contentious political issue on the campus, can take dynamic leadership roles as they position themselves differently and a different subject identity is foregrounded.

63. The shuttling between agentive and deterministic constitution of subjectivity within discourses is deliberate. While subjects may have some limited choices regarding how they position themselves within discourses, they do not have the extent of the choice accorded to the humanist individual and any apparent “choices” need to be seen in the context of strong deterministic processes. I am not therefore arguing that this student has the freedom to “adopt” an appropriate subjectivity for a particular purpose though he may well be aware to some degree of apparent contradictions between his various positions.



Because this student is constructed in a particular way in the context of his early university career, does not imply that these identities will remain constant, nor that he will construct himself or be constructed similarly in other contexts. Six months later during the post-programme workshop, certain shifts in his account are clearly evident. While in his original “good student” paragraph, this student was one of a few who included, if rather peripherally, a “critical” dimension to his description, his later description foregrounds this aspect far more forcefully. He opens his paragraph with assertion that a good student should be able to offer constructive criticism and resist automatic acceptance of the status quo. Being “mentally independent” and open to “correction and criticism”(Q:21) add to a changed emphasis, a focus on active and critical academic engagement at the expense of the rather more passive and obedient student of the earlier account. Interestingly too, the early “respect and love for colleagues and teachers alike” is now directed only towards “fellow students”. Although it cannot be claimed that this change constitutes the emergence of an entirely new perspective, it certainly adds an important new and critical dimension to his earlier account.

One addition to the later paragraph, however, does mark the emergence of a previously absent discourse in this student’s writing. Whereas the early version of the “good student discourse” was located solely in the domain of academic activity, the later one evidences the emergence of an additional discourse, that of “community service”. “Good student” characteristics now include someone who “strongly identifies himself with the community and is always at hand to be of service. He knows what it means to sacrifice and never complains unnecessarily” (Q: 21). In Fairclough’s terms the mode of intertextuality here is “embedded intertextuality, where one text or discourse type is clearly contained within the matrix of another” (1992c: 118). When asked to account for changes during the first semester, this student identifies the emergence of the new discourse himself:

I think at school we were not trained to realise the centrality of our communities. The moment one starts being a university student he is encouraged to be critical and view things from different perspectives and angles. Therefor as a result, a person starts to see the importance of the community with relation to himself. I think it can also be argued that we were psychologically oppressed as a result of Bantu Education indoctrination which encourages individualism. We are in

university, not as individuals who seek glory, fortune and fame but as representatives of our people, their aims and aspirations. (Q: 22-23)

Evident now in Nathi's account are at least three discourses - those relating to academic activity, political activity and community service.<sup>64</sup> Only a few explicit links between the three domains are made by the student. At one point he links academic and community service discourses noting that "The law course is an eye opener, and on the whole I feel that during my internship I will be useful to the community". He does not link his political commitment explicitly to his sense of responsibility towards the community but it is reasonable to assume a relationship between the two, particularly in the South African context.

In his initial positioning text, this student notes that he wants to be part of the process towards making the university "genuinely non-racial, non-sexist and democratic" (Q: 2). Paradoxically, however, in his first "good student" paragraph there is no linguistic evidence of gender-inclusive language. On the four occasions when he uses a pronoun, in every case he chooses "he". Other references are the repeated use of "a good student", which, given the total lack of inclusive language in the immediate linguistic environment, may reasonably be assumed to refer to male students. In his later paragraph, however, the emergence, albeit somewhat tentative, of gender-inclusive language, is clearly evident. On five occasions he chooses the inclusive "he/she" or "him/her" construction but in four cases such a choice is immediately followed by two or three examples of the more familiar and exclusive "he" which he uses on nine occasions. The use of the new linguistic construction is therefore unstable as he shuttles between the new form (with which he starts and ends) and the more dominant old form. This linguistic instability in written text (often represented in the form of hesitations and false starts in spoken text) is common amongst students who have recently become more conscious of the ways in which language can be used to position people and is one of the indications that new forms of expression are beginning to take the place of older, often more derogatory forms, but have not yet been fully integrated into everyday usage (Janks and Ivanič 1992).

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64. I have distinguished between academic and community discourse here, though it could be argued that if a student has been "taught" community discourse (as this student's account implies) that it is, in fact, part of academic discourse.

One of the factors which contributed towards this changing linguistic form was the critical language programme. In his analysis of university texts at the end of the initial eight weeks, this student's writing evidences considerable understanding of the principles of critical language awareness.<sup>65</sup> In his response to the text about the Malherbe Residence rules, he includes a discussion of modality, the use of the passive and the differential construction of gender, achieved in this case, largely through the choice of lexical items. He analyses this latter aspect of the text as follows: "The writer clearly positions women students. They have a late-leave key which is a privilege as opposed to men's unrestricted entrance. They are thought to be irresponsible, whereas nothing of that sort is said of Malherbe male residents" (Q: 17).

It should also be acknowledged here that the use of the new linguistic form could be the result of a better mastery of the English linguistic system *per se*.<sup>66</sup> In Zulu, the pronoun system makes no distinction between masculine and feminine (Nyembezi 1970). This absence of gendered pronouns results in frequent difficulty with the English pronoun system and so, the inclusion of the he/she distinction and the instability of the form could mark the student's new awareness of the *system* rather than a desire to be more gender sensitive. In the context of this particular research programme, however, it is likely that the reasons for the change are linked to gender-inclusive language rather than to systemic considerations. It is nevertheless impossible to be sure of the precise origins of the change which, whatever its cause, is an instance of improved linguistic usage.<sup>67</sup>

#### 6.4.9.4 Case Study Three

The third study (see Appendix R) highlights the experiences and responses of a seventeen year old Zulu-speaking woman named Nonhlanhla who entered the university immediately after she

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65. Another task completed by students at the end of the course which also provided as an indication of the extent of their understanding of the principles of critical language awareness was the evaluation. Unfortunately, this student did not complete an evaluation.

66. I am not aware of any research which explores this issue.

67. These observations also apply to other examples of changed pronoun usage (see, for example 6.4.9.4).

left school. In her initial writing task she positions herself in relation to other students who, she says, “fail to adjust . . . find themselves free of their parents’ rules . . . [and] even forget why they came to varsity” (R: 1). Instead, realising that she “suffered too much as far as financial matters are concerned” she indicates her intention to “make friends with people who are serious about their work so that we can work together for success” (R: 1-2). She also makes reference to “the Lord who made me” (R: 2), a thread in her account which appears on several occasions.

In her first “good student” paragraph, in which students are referred to throughout as “he”, she positions students passively as co-operative people in all respects, people who show “respect for fellow classmates”, who realise that teachers “are always there to help” and who remember “at all times that God helps those who help themselves” (R: 3) This passive perspective is also evident in her responses to the reading texts. When asked how students are described in the first text, she sees them as characterised as having “mistaken idea” and “floundering badly” (R: 12). She also notes that the headline of the text is formulated as a “warning” rather than as “an advice” (which is the case in Text B) and as such has an “intimidating” effect which means that “one suddenly feels unprepared for university” (R: 14). Despite these observations, however, she is one of only nine students to view the attitude of the author as sympathetic to students:

The writer has a sympathetic attitude to students. We find him mentioning the fact that students usually have mistaken ideas about their work and that they always expect information from lecturers. By writing this article he has managed to prove certain students’ mistaken ideas . . . which is why I say he has a sympathetic attitude to them. (R: 12)

Later she indicates a preference for Text B but still resists a clear judgement regarding the possibly negative attitude of the author of Text A. When asked to compare the attitudes evident in the two texts, she says “The attitude is similar only the manner of approaching new-year students is different. The words used are not exactly similar yet they mean the same thing” (R: 13).

The prevarication and ambivalence in this student’s responses need some explanation. Given her linguistic proficiency, it is highly unlikely that she has misunderstood at least the broad meaning

of “sympathetic”. The rather incongruous juxtaposition of “floundering, mistaken” students with a “sympathetic” author can be better explained if it is linked with the passive positioning of students in her “good student” paragraph. At this early stage in her university life, she is strongly located within the discourse so dominant in South African schools; her subjectivity as “passive student” who should not express oppositional opinions is foregrounded here as she attempts a critical response to these texts but in the end adopts a position which leaves the identity of the “sympathetic” author, and with it, the assumed power of the written word largely unquestioned and certainly not in any sense undermined.

What emerges in these initial writing tasks are three discourses; academic discourse is clearly evident but it is closely linked to school-based discourse, most especially with regard to the encouragement of student passivity. The religious or, more specifically, Christian discourse emerges clearly in two instances (R:2 and 3) and, although it is placed at the end of both texts, it is represented as the dominant and framing discourse. The “good student” then, is not positioned entirely within the domain of academic discourse as was the case in Case Study Two but is located within the context of both religious and academic and school-based discourses. This is an example of “embedded intertextuality” (Fairclough 1992c: 118) where discourses are clearly identifiable: the academic discourse is embedded within the matrix of the religious discourse. Political discourse, which Nathi drew on so often in his account in Case Study Two, is completely absent here as is the conflict between the “activist” and “good student” subjectivities. There is only a hint of conflicting subjectivities in this writing and this is between the “passive” and “critical” student.

In the post-programme workshop completed six months later, Nonhlanhla’s definition of a “good student” retains some of its earlier features and also signals interesting shifts. Significantly, it now includes a more critical dimension, though this is confined to a critical response to *courses* rather than to lecturers and there is still evidence of conflict between the passive and the critical subjectivities. She begins her later definition of a good student by stating that this is someone who “takes her courses seriously, someone who assesses the information she gets from courses critically and never takes information as it is” (R: 20). Interestingly, however, her writing still evidences some conflict around this emergent critical subjectivity. This statement is the first of

two beginnings - it is bracketed and separated from the second version, which, significantly, now *excludes* any reference to the critical assessment of courses. Instead, it begins

A good student is someone who takes her work courses seriously. Such a person attends lectures regularly and prepares beforehand for lectures; so that if problems are encountered during a lecture she might be in a good position to question the lecturer afterwards and ask for help. (R: 20-21)

Later she speaks of the importance of the critical discussion of essays and then adds the still compliant “since that is what academics accept/want” (R: 21). What emerges here cannot be termed a strong new discourse in her account but it is nevertheless the clear, yet tentative beginnings of a “critical” subjectivity, located slightly differently, though still somewhat uncomfortably within the “good student” discourse. In other contexts the student herself is extremely positive about the shifts. She herself cites “critical discussion” and “active studying” (R: 22) as new in her thinking and also identifies, rather broadly, the cause of this change: “Through critical language awareness I learnt things I did not know when I first came to varsity and this has encouraged me to view things critically which is something I never did when I first came to varsity” (R: 22). For her, the capacity to critically evaluate goes beyond the immediate university context, directly affecting her future, personal life. It is the first of the three most valuable university experiences she mentions: “The importance of evaluating things I came across has been very valuable because this will be very important to me in future . . . Knowing that I critically evaluate information will make people forget about taking advantage of me” (R: 23).

At the end of the eight week CLS programme, which, chronologically, was mid-way between the initial writing tasks and the post-programme workshop, her evaluation of the programme reveals clear insights into some of the key principles of critical language awareness. Having just completed the programme, and therefore “closer” to its specific features, she provides a more detailed account of what it means to become critical:

I am grateful for the Critical Language Study tutorials because through them I have learned to read books critically. Before, I did not even bother about the words used by an author and their effect on readers. I now do that only because of the Critical Language Study Tutorials. I also question an author’s use of words now and I even consider the words he might have used instead of those he used. CLS tutorials have also taught me to create connections in texts. (R: 18)

Another feature of her later texts is the emergence of a socially oriented account and a newly constituted subjectivity accompanying it. As she herself notes, at the beginning of the year her focus was almost exclusively on academic activities but “3L has taught me that it is quite important to balance one’s social life with the academic life (which is something I never did)” (R: 19). One of the most valuable university experiences for her was that “I have made friends that I value very much and they are valuable because we share sorrows and happiness” (R: 23). Making friends has taken on a new dimension and is now seen as “a way of socialising and not just seeking working partners” (R: 22).

This social orientation can be viewed in conjunction with other socially oriented texts with each dimension contributing to her increased use of social discourse. At an individual level she states that she has “changed as a person” and that she has “spent some time questioning [herself] about becoming a teacher” (R:19). Her shift of perspective has important implications for career choice: “I feel being a psychologist will be enjoyable since I really enjoy listening to other people’s problems, sharing problems, and helping people solve their problems. Yet, such a career is difficult to reach” (R: 19-20).<sup>68</sup>

The changes, then, are not only in terms of her individual development. There is a strong communal aspect to her perspective as well as insights into individual shifts. Her new interest also intermeshes with her desire for improved relationships between different race groups. When asked about the least valuable aspects of her university experience she has this to say:

Racial tension has made my heart very sad, I do have friends from other races but I am also very aware that there are barriers between different race groups. Such is least not even valuable because if it is not solved, the new South Africa we are hoping for, won’t be a very good place to be in. (R: 23)

Although she does not link her interest in psychology explicitly with racial interaction the intertextual relationship is clear with each strand relating to a “social” discourse type, and each strand contributing towards her later perspective.

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68. This student was accepted onto a Master’s programme in Clinical Psychology and completed her internship at the end of 1997.

The different use of gendered pronouns, which emerges during the first six months is an interesting linguistic feature of this student's account and one which is particularly evident in her "good student" paragraphs. While in Case Study Two it was the *instability* of the gendered constructions that was noteworthy, in this case it is the complete and consistent switch from one gendered referent to another that is of interest. In the first version (R: 3), she uses only the male referent while in the second, when she chooses a pronoun, she uses "she". Other than general statements about becoming more critical, there is nothing in the rest of her writing that provides a trace of the reason for this shift. She did not analyse the Malherbe residence rules, so it is impossible to glean a sense of her opinions about differentially positioned gender relations. It is nevertheless feasible that a sharper focus on unequal gender relations was an aspect of her newly acquired critical perspective and that in her switch from "he" to "she" she deliberately chose to foreground the female referent and to exclude the more dominant "he" (but see also discussion in 6.4.9.3).

Earlier in this analysis the complete absence of this student's reliance on political discourse was noted. It is certainly true that she did not locate herself directly within the political discourse of student activist within the university but this need not imply that she had not acquired political discourse more broadly. On the contrary, some of her writing evidences a sharp political awareness. In the final analysis of university texts, for example, she chose to analyse two different texts from the class exercises rather than the two suggested. Interestingly, this entailed analysing two politically oriented texts rather than the extract from the Malherbe residence rules, which focus on gender relations and the brief article from the student newspaper about the closure of the Denison Residence pub.

The first of the texts ( see Appendix I(ii)) appears under the heading "*Students tour township school*" and recounts a student tour around Georgetown high school in which the writer compares the present quiet with past violence and highlights features of the environment which still indicate the effects of the past. This student begins by identifying some of the lexical choices in the text, isolating "angry stone throwers, suppressed, rioting" (R: 16) and then notes



The use of language does not make one feel inferior to the author's authority such as the rules book; but the choice of words describing people leaves many questions in a reader's mind. The author does not attempt to explain why there was rioting in the township before or how peace was brought about. Again, maybe the author assumed that we all know why black children have such a small number of teachers and why there are not enough schools and why the situation is taking so long to be rectified. The author should have been more explicit.

By querying the textual silences here, this student has clearly understood one of the key features of CLA but beyond that she has revealed her own knowledge and experience of the South African political context and, in addition, her ability to interpret it. This happens again in her analysis of a text in which a student journalist apologises to the Pan African Student Organisation for referring to it as "a sabotage terrorist group" and changes the description to "the military wing" (see Appendix I(ii)) She notes that

Such a mistake indicates how uninformed South Africans were about political organisations. Uninformed is not exactly the word, misinformed is better probably because a propaganda and press, censorship. (R: 17)

Here she fully understands the varying positioning of the organisation through the lexical choices within the text but she also uses insights beyond the text to add political flesh to her analysis.

What is of most interest here is that, despite her political insights, Nonhlanhla does not constitute herself within political discourse in the way, for example, that Nathi does. Indeed, the absence of this particular discourse at any point is a notable feature of all the female participants in this study. The prevailing view of the subjectivity of black women would explain this by arguing that it is not in the "nature" of women to engage in overt political discourse. This view of a unified subject, however, cannot account for the political insights and overt political interest she expresses elsewhere nor for the fact that although she possessed the necessary discourse, in terms of her own roles and identity within the university, she was nevertheless constituted within other discourses. A poststructuralist view, which highlights multiple subjectivity within specific social contexts, would explain this differently, first by analysing the way in which women, and more specifically African women, are socially positioned and then by considering her likely subject positions within the university context. In terms of her social conditioning which would

foreground passivity and service, it is unlikely that this student would position herself, or be positioned, in oppositional, activist terms. The subjectivities which are more likely to be foregrounded, especially at this stage of her university career, are those of academic, cautious critic and Christian and, in relation to her career, care-taker (as opposed to political representative) of society. However, at a later stage, as she is constituted differently, there is no reason why an “activist” subjectivity should not emerge.

#### 6.4.9.5 Case Study Four: A Cameo

Case Study Four is subtitled “a cameo” because the analysis presented here is not as extensive as that in the previous case studies. It has been included as an example of a student whose initial definition of what it means to be a “good student” was *apparently* different from the vast majority of other students but which, in the end, does not reveal such stark differences. It is also interesting in terms of its use of pronouns.

In each of the case studies presented so far, despite strong contrasts between them, and even when the initial description of students’ roles at the university has included a range of activities (see also 6.4.2.4), “good students” are initially positioned largely as passive recipients and exclusively within academic discourse. This, however, is not always the case. Sipho (see Appendix S), a Zulu-speaking male, provides a different view:

A good student is someone who will certainly try to strive for perfection . . . if a student can try and set high standards for him or herself . . . he will be on a right way . . . A good student must also be involved in some extra mural activities apart from education. A good student is someone who must be educated in a broader sense of the word. Personality also counts . . . he or she should be able to accomodate the community as his/ [“her” inserted above the line] own people he/ [“she” inserted above the line] should not forget where [“he” inserted above the line”]/she comes from. (S: 3-4)<sup>69</sup>

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69. Because of the interesting process of pronoun choice which is evident in the original text (and not in the typed one) a copy of Sipho’s original paragraph has been included at the end of Appendix S: 25.

This account of a “good student” is notably different from the other three in that it implies an active role for students and draws on and combines a range of discourses from the outset. The result is a hybrid text, which is an example of “mixed intertextuality” (Fairclough 1992c: 118) where different discourses (academic, social and personal) intermesh to form a single text. Interestingly, while Nathi (see 6.4.9.3) defined himself in a range of roles (Q: 2) and the “good student” only in academic terms (Q: 3-4), Siphso does the opposite. While he provides a broad definition of a “good student” (S: 3-4), he views his role within the university more narrowly: “The things that I will do at this university are simple and clear work hard and pass. I will certainly join other activities in the campus when I am aware of what I am doing and where I am going with my studies” (S: 2).<sup>70</sup>

At first sight then, Siphso provides an interesting alternative and more balanced view of “a good student”. Further analysis of his later texts, however, suggests that he may, after all, have viewed a “good student” in a very similar way to the majority of the students. For example, when writing about the differences between his earlier views and those at mid-year, he indicates that he “got involved in activities besides [his] studies” (S: 22) and also that he had learnt “that a good student should not be submissive . . .” (S: 22). Both of these features, identified as *differences*, imply an earlier view which, despite evidence to the contrary, represents a narrower, more passive concept than at first appeared to be the case. Rather than implying a belief in pro-active participation on the part of students, the silences in his text imply the opposite. This suspicion is strengthened further by his analysis of the cause of the changes:

What has caused the changes is the reality of the situation one had to face once here at varsity. One had to learn from mistakes and this lead to a *broader discovery* of what a good student is. At first it was *just a talk* that a good student is such and such but now we are talking from experience. (S: 23, my emphasis)

Here, Siphso indicates quite clearly that what he wrote early in the year was, in fact, not based entirely on experience, that it was indeed, “just a talk”; it is not unreasonable to assume from this that he was writing according to what he imagined was expected of him rather than basing his

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70. Siphso’s very conscious insertion of gender inclusive language (which, interestingly, is not confined to the female pronoun), is also noteworthy here.

description on his own views. In the end, apparently striking differences between his and the other students' views are no more than superficial ones.

Sipho's use of pronouns in his initial "good student" paragraph also warrants comment. In the first half of the paragraph he uses "himself or herself", "he" and "he or she" (see Appendix S: 25); although his usage varies between gender inclusive language and the generic "he", it is reasonably stable and assured and there is no indication of why he made the linguistic choices he did. In the last five lines of the paragraph, however, a different process becomes evident. On three occasions, Sipho uses "he/she" but in each case, he chooses one of the two options first ("he" twice and "she" once) and then, above the line, inserts the other pronoun. Because this occurs *before* the critical language programme and because there is little evidence of gender sensitivity elsewhere in his data, it seems likely that this student is evidencing a knowledge of the English linguistic system. He appears to know (but momentarily to forget) that in English there is a distinction within the pronoun system between masculine and feminine and also that some writers employ both forms in their writing. Interestingly too, it is not the same pronoun that is inserted in each case. Had Sipho been defaulting to the traditionally dominant male generic, it is likely that his primary choice would have been "he" in each case and the forgotten "she" would have been the inserted pronoun. What seems evident here is the process of a learner gradually coming to terms with a second, and different linguistic system. What his original paragraph highlights is the self-monitoring taking place during the production of the text as he remembers the required forms and changes his choices accordingly (Krashen 1982; 1985).

#### **6.4.10 General Conclusions**

Analysis of this data reveals that while it is possible to identify trends and similarities and to make pedagogical decisions on the basis of these, it is equally important to acknowledge the diversity and the contradictions contained in the data. The analysis of the three case studies and the final cameo serves to illustrate how students are located within a range of different discourses, how they constitute themselves and are constituted within different discourse types and how the emergence of new discourses differs in the case of each. Sometimes the difference

is a question of the extent to which varying discourses overlap and which discourse (and hence subjectivity) dominates in a particular context. Sometimes the differences are more starkly drawn with one discourse completely absent or resisted in the case of one student and dominant in the case of another. The key consideration here is that the precise intertextual balances of the discourses which constitute any one subject are finely nuanced and are different from the balances which constitute another. Closely tied to this is the fact that, while there are common points of experience and response, there is equally strong evidence of conflicting subjectivities both between students and *within* single human subjects. The differences and contradictions which emerge from this data highlight once again Weiler's (1991) caution against defining any marginalised group in homogeneous terms. These black students could all be classed as oppressed South Africans and all expected to respond the same way to their oppression. It is true that they have all experienced apartheid South Africa and yet, within that common experience, they each constitute themselves slightly differently and these differences need to be held in careful tension with the realities of powerful and oppressive social structures which they share (Apple 1993; Hennessy 1993; Luke 1995).

## **6.5 Reflection**

### **6.5.1 Introduction**

In the discussion of the post-programme workshop above, there is no doubt that there were significant shifts in the perceptions and positioning of students in the university context during the first semester of their first year. What is at issue here, is the extent to which the CLS programme, which is the subject of this study, influenced these shifts and how it interacted with other variables.

Because there are so many intermeshing stimuli impacting on the lives and perceptions of students, especially as they enter university, this is extremely difficult to assess. Student responses themselves indicate that a general familiarisation and orientation process, what might be termed "immersion" in university discourses, has a pivotal and primary role to play, and this would support Gee's (1996) view that discourses, initially at least, need to be acquired rather than

learnt. It also lends credence to Said's (1983) notion of texts as worldly, as being integral, often indistinguishable parts of a lived environment rather than easily identifiable, discrete entities. Having acknowledged this, however, it is also clear that many students specifically identified the CLS programme as being valuable and beneficial. There is no question that it brought a range of issues to the attention of the students by focusing on the constructed nature of social and educational phenomena and their linguistic articulation and that, according to both student and tutor assessments, it facilitated a deeper understanding and awareness of university practice.

### **6.5.2 The Impact of the Critical Language Study Programme on the Students**

While the precise relationship between the acquisition of discourses and the formal learning of them is difficult to specify, the data generated by this research highlights some specific features of the programme which emerge as contributing both to student understanding of and response to university practices and to the understanding and practices of the university educators. From the students' perspective, several features are noteworthy. Firstly, it is evident that motivation for most aspects of this programme was extremely high and this is linked both to the way in which the materials were presented and to their content and general relevance. Both student and tutor evaluations indicate that the majority of participants engaged co-operatively and positively with the material and student entries in dialogue journals substantiate this further. While some aspects of this enthusiasm may have little to do with the CLS materials *per se*, there is no doubt that the fact that they had been part of the selection of the texts on which the materials were developed and their knowledge that students had been responsible for the rewriting of one of them in conjunction with this particular approach to the teaching of language, made a crucial contribution.

Secondly, student analyses of texts clearly evidenced a more focused ability to identify and explain a range of linguistic constructions which can encode institutional power relations. Greater awareness of language use in a variety of contexts was identified by many as a benefit of the programme and certainly this was underscored by tutors' perceptions of more sophisticated response to and use of language by students. Closely related to this are student assertions about

improved ability to read critically and to recognise different linguistic constructions in a range of texts. These claims, however, have not been substantiated since the initial implementation of the programme. There has been no follow-up tracking of the participants and it is therefore impossible to do any more than speculate about the possible longer term benefits of the programme. The extent to which knowledge about surface linguistic structures has become integrated into an analysis of the context of a text, for example, has not been explored and neither has the students' long term ability to read critically been assessed.

Two related issues require some discussion here. The first relates to the use of CLA as an approach to language teaching. Referring to Fairclough's model for CDA (see 3.4.2), Janks has pointed out that his three dimensional model with its descriptive, interpretative and explanatory domains requires that the interdependence of each level is constantly taken into account. In terms of textual analysis she points out that

Because these different forms of analysis are mutually dependent, it is possible to use any one as an entry point to CDA and problematic to use one in isolation from the others . . . the chosen entry point provides only one lens through which to consider the data and . . . other lenses are essential to provide other pictures. (1996: 3-5)

In this study one of the most notable features of the student responses was the complete absence of analysis at anything other than the descriptive level (see 6.4.5); despite the attempt to keep the two broader dimensions in focus by constant reference to the textual collage (see 6.2.3.2 and Appendix H), the descriptive aspect completely overshadowed them. This resulted in text-bound analyses in which writer and reader were "trapped" within the text which was completely divorced from its broad social context. This uni-lensed perspective, the turning inward to the text, meant that there was a serious analytical truncation devoid of social analysis and a lack of engagement in the broader debates. It also meant that students were, however unintentionally, being encouraged to locate meaning "inside" the text, within its grammatical features rather than viewing it as being constructed within the discourse in its social context. It was as though the potential for critical analysis had given way to the teaching of grammar albeit of a particular kind.

This failing does not indicate an intrinsic problem with Fairclough's model nor does it highlight an inadequacy in the students. What it does, is to identify a flaw in the design and emphasis of the programme. It is a flaw which can be explained partially in terms of the time constraints experienced in the context of the classroom and also in terms of the difficulties inherent in holding three dimensions of analysis in constant tension. It is also tempting to concentrate on the more discrete and finite aspects of analysis and this most especially when it is a dimension which students particularly enjoy. Second language speakers in the South African context often respond well to "grammar lessons"; grammar is an aspect of learning English with which they are already familiar and, as is so often the case when students have been exposed to audio-lingual methods of teaching, students frequently feel that knowledge of linguistic structure has intrinsic value and should be of primary concern. These observations, however, in no way provide an excuse for side-stepping the difficulties identified. Any future CLA programme should make a more concerted effort to foreground the other two dimensions and to ensure that students have constant opportunities to consider the interpretative and the explanatory dimensions of analysis as well. The second issue requiring discussion is the problem surrounding the use and meaning of the word "critical". As Figures 7 and 8 rather dramatically indicate, there was marked increase in students' emphasis on a critical perspective in general and critical learning strategies in particular. These indications of changes in perception and self-definition need extremely cautious interpretation; like most quantitative data, the figures represented in the graphs should be viewed as the broadest "brush stroke," the most general way of representing the total picture. Within this, a careful, balanced and more nuanced analysis is necessary, one which holds many possible interpretations of the data in constant tension.

In the first place it should be remembered that students had only recently been introduced to the principles of CLS; it was a word that they had heard often and this primacy effect could have had an influence on their responses. In addition, it must be acknowledged that in any evaluation there will be some respondents who provide comments that they think evaluators would appreciate and this no doubt happened in a few cases here. Also, there were ten students who made no attempt to define the term; on such slender evidence it is impossible to make even tentative assertions about their perceptions. Together, these three observations imply that it would be naive to read



the figures represented in the graphs at face value and make extravagant claims about the success of the CLS programme.

Equally, however, it would be inaccurate to dismiss the trends emerging from the data; there is a clear indication that many students *were* articulating new insights and that they had made significant shifts in the way in which they positioned themselves as learners within the university context. Of the thirty-five students who mentioned critical perspectives for the first time in the August workshop (eighteen indicated in Figure 7 and seventeen in Figure 8), twenty-five of these specifically attempted to define at least some aspect of what they meant by the term. Definitions ranged from the search for hidden meaning to evaluating and balancing negative and positive aspects of an argument, to resisting simple acceptance of information and challenging lecturers in open debate. These multiple explanations, linked with the responses to the reading text (see Appendix G), the textual analyses (see Appendix I) and the evaluations of the CLS programme (see Appendix L) certainly do not provide a definitive description of critical processes but they are nevertheless clear evidence that many students were at least in the process of redefining themselves as learners.

Closely linked to the emergence of critical perspectives, and an important part of it, is the development of confidence and a far less passive approach to learning and to the university as an institution. This is attributed by the students partly to the influence of *Learning, Language and Logic* as a whole and more particularly to the CLS component. Again, it is difficult to specify their precise influence but there is no doubt that, in conjunction with other factors, they facilitate a more active and interrogative stance in students. An interesting area for further exploration would be the extent to which this interrogative stance is coupled with students' awareness of their own construction in discourse.

### **6.5.3 Pedagogical Implications**

From a pedagogical point of view, the programme resulted in several interrelated developments and new insights. The most immediate of these was increased awareness on the part of tutors

regarding the dangers of becoming too ensnared in skills acquisition processes, too concerned with the more “results orientated” aspects of the course at the expense or even total exclusion of a critical analysis of the socio-political and educational context in which students are required to operate. While it has been argued that the “critical” and the “skills” dimensions of the course can be in tension and potential competition with each other, it became increasingly apparent that this need not be the case and that the critical dimension of the course could become completely integral to it. The implications of this are that there may not need to be a separate “critical language” component but that a critical perspective should inform all aspects of the course. Considerations of power relations of various kinds of the ways in which lexical choices and linguistic constructions can encode these relationships would then become part of all skills acquisition processes (see also 7.1).

One clear need to emerge from the programme was for tutors to be provided with greater opportunity to develop expertise in the complex field of critical reading processes and for this to be linked more rigorously to insights from CLA. In terms of curriculum development, this will entail a commitment to the allocation of additional time for the facilitation and development of reading skills. It would also facilitate the further integration of the CLA component into the *Learning, Language and Logic* curriculum.

Perhaps the most significant pedagogical insight to emerge from this research, and one which is of particular relevance to universities during the present transitional period, is the importance of acknowledging the integration of “otherness” or diversity into both the classroom context and the university as a whole. To create a context in which all contesting positions can be equally acknowledged implies that potentially conflictual situations must be confronted rather than avoided in the name of harmony. It also implies, in the context of a rapidly changing student population, that groups which may now be perceived as the incoming, minority or “other” group will occupy a position of future dominance and that traditionally dominant groups could conceivably become “the other” group. A further consideration is that increased tolerance of “otherness” could, in itself, be potentially emancipatory. If the university’s Mission Statement is to be put into practice, these considerations need to be central to its deliberations.

Through their responses to the wide range of tasks which constituted this programme, student participants repeatedly challenged and cautioned against any temptation to construct them as a homogeneous group; they denied the possibility of simplistic notions of oppression and they provided stark illustrations of what is implied by the notion of plurality of meaning. Through their own shifting perceptions across a six month period, they also exemplified in some small measure why a poststructuralist notion of a multiple, fragmented and changing subject has far greater explanatory power than the humanist notion of one that is fixed and unified (see Appendices P-S).

The pedagogical challenges which emerge from this research have far reaching implications, not only for the ongoing development of *Learning, Language and Logic* but for future curriculum development in the university as a whole. There can be no blueprint for this process. Despite increased inter-disciplinary collaboration, each discipline needs nevertheless to plot its own development route, to formulate a set of pedagogical principles which take account of the need for innovative curricula in the face of diversity, and which have sufficient flexibility to change in ways which adequately respond to the broader socio-political changes which will continue to challenge and tax all educators. Practical implementation will vary across the disciplines but there is no doubt that the starting point should be a sound analysis of present institutional practice in the current South African context and the power relationships which underpin and shape it.

#### **6.5.4 Evaluating Emancipatory Action Research in a South African University Context**

Throughout this thesis, there has been an attempt to resist interpreting both the broad context and the participants in this research through a “totalising” lens. Instead, the emphasis has been on diversity, multiplicity, partiality and the inevitability of fluid and dynamic social change. In assessing whether or not this research can be termed “emancipatory”, the same principle must apply. If this programme is measured against the criteria of “emancipation”, “participation” and “empowerment” as it is laid down in much of the literature on emancipatory action research (see 4.2.2.3), then it can make no claim to have succeeded. There is certainly no evidence here of emancipation or change in “a grand sense” (Walker 1995: 11). There were no major power shifts

between the student participants and the university authorities and there was no observed, sudden and deliberate flaunting of academic conventions either broadly or in the context of specific disciplines. There was nothing that can be claimed to represent a significant resistance or change of power relations at any level.

And yet, if “emancipation”, “participation” and “empowerment” are rewritten (Ebert 1991; see also 2.1) and understood from a postmodernist perspective which tolerates plurality, shifting contexts and uncertainty (see 4.2.6), then the possibility for emancipation for individual subjects, in very specific contexts with much less “grand” consequences, remains a strong possibility. It is certainly true that for some students no shifts of any description were evident during their first few months at university; during this time, these participants did not draw on any of the alternative discourses that were available to them. For the large majority of participants, however, this is not true. Again and again, student responses point to important personal redefinition as they draw from a range of different discourses previously unknown to them. One female student identified the reasons for her shifting position in the context of the university by saying

In the beginning I came out with lot of expectations, my expectations were based on what I heard. But being here at varsity and physical experience has changed my thinking. This is like a transitional stage from my schooling exposure to my university exposure.

The limitation of the ability to express opinions has diminished. If I had these opinions before, maybe I suppressed them with the fear of what I thought could become of me, by being open minded. I hadn't learnt to be objective and critical to any matter . . . This is an attribute of the kind of education system that I received. (C2/S44)

For the vast majority of white South African students, the import of a comment such as this would be unremarkable and warrant little response. Indeed, for many of them, the point of this student's narrative might go completely unnoted. In other words, for them, a shift towards open-

mindedness *as it is described here* is unremarkable and would be of little consequence to their lives. This does not imply that white South African schools engender a particular open-mindedness; indeed, many of them foster prejudices that, in the long term, disadvantage their learners in other ways. The nature and extent of her passivity and the suppression of her own views, however, is a feature more common to the overtly authoritarian black schooling system. In the context of her discourses, this experience takes on central significance in a way that is unlikely to be shared by white (or some black) learners. In her life, at this particular time, against the backdrop of her experiences of Bantu education, a new capacity to express an opinion was a liberating experience. The point here is that the emancipatory “truth” of an event is absolutely dependent on its precise context - it is neither possible nor desirable to generalise about what is or is not “emancipatory” (see also 4.3.1).

#### **6.5.4.1 The Role of the Researcher in Emancipatory Action Research: A Personal Perspective**

When this research process began, I believed that for progressive teachers and researchers, pedagogical challenges revolved around certain key debates, the chief of these being equitable educational access for all South African citizens. From a personal perspective and in broad socio-political terms, I was adamantly opposed to the injustices of apartheid and had, since my student days, become increasingly conscious of the impact of the legalised discrimination and oppression brought about by the apartheid government. Within this broad perspective, I was informed, sometimes only implicitly, by the central principles of critical pedagogy and had a strong commitment to being part of a process which might result in better educational provision for this particular group of students. In my view, issues were relatively clear-cut - there were certain gross injustices which needed response from a progressive group committed to political, social and educational change and I was determined to contribute to that change, if only in minor ways.

It was against this backdrop that I opted to use emancipatory action research as a way of exploring and changing my own classroom practice. The role of the researcher within this model was of particular interest most especially the requirements to recognise that the researcher is an integral part of the total research context, is a self-interested participant in the process rather than

an external observer and should therefore explicitly acknowledge the values which underpin her interpretations of the world (see 4.2.4). Certainly at the outset of this research process, I attempted to be as explicit as possible with the student participants and to explain exactly what my aim was and how I might benefit from the experience as well as what I hoped would be of value for them (see 6.3.3). At the time, I was satisfied that I had fulfilled the requirements of this research approach and that the research contract provided me with a platform from which I could interact with the students and from which other dimensions of the programme could develop. A contract, with all its implicit claims about negotiation with participants, democratic research principles and the undermining of traditional power relations was a central symbol and one which I considered to be an integral part of the research. When the students agreed to participate in the programme, I remember thinking that in an important sense I had been provided with a legitimate context in which to work. The negotiation was over and I was ready to begin.

That, however, turned out to be only the beginning of a process of negotiation, not only with the students but, as importantly, with many of the central ideas I had considered to be inviolable. As I pursued a range of literature, most especially in the fields of social theory, pedagogy and feminism, I was gradually confronted by a series of challenges which have resulted in the unravelling of long-held assumptions which had formed the corner-stone of my thinking for many years. Certainties, for example, about what constituted oppression in the South African context, about power relations, about appropriate teaching practice, about the possibilities for emancipation and change, about the nature of post-apartheid South Africa, gave way to a tentativeness and an intellectual and personal insecurity about what could be called the “truth”, to the realisation that Hall’s “slippage of meaning” (1985:92) was impacting directly on the analytical constructs that had defined my practice. As I began to draw on new discourses and to redefine myself as a female teacher in a university context, I realised that this research process is as much an account of my own emerging subjectivities as it is of the student participants. Theirs is the narrative that is explicitly foregrounded in this study, but also interwoven in this text is the implicit account of my own resistances to relinquishing comfortable totalising constructs and of a new capacity to tolerate the uncertainties at the centre of a postmodern world. When Walker speaks of the potential of action research to change practices and lives she says

The real responsibility is to change oneself, searching and struggling with others for the social space in which we might challenge and reassemble the self, to see more intensely, to turn easy answers into critical questions, and to practise freedom by recognising recurring games of truth through a critique always of “what is”. (1995:11)

This comment also represents my own view -- the declaration of personal self-interest is not an end in itself; it is just the beginning of the often uncomfortable and always demanding process of being positioned and repositioned in response to constantly changing social and educational contexts.

### **6.5.5 A Concluding Comment**

This research was underpinned by five questions posed at the beginning of the chapter and it has provided at least a partial answer to each of them. Through the CLS Programme, it has shown one way of making the power relations in the university more explicit to first year, second language students and facilitated a process through which they became more aware of how they are positioned through text within the university. The effects of this have been illustrated by students in a range of ways and the insights gained from their responses have assisted us to better integrate this material into the *Learning, Language and Logic* course. It has also become clear that CLA has a role to play in facilitating an understanding of institutional practice and, when necessary, contesting it. This role, however, must be carefully defined within an explicit socio-historical context and take serious account of the postmodernist notions of multiplicity and open-endedness of meaning, the construction of subject identity, its often plural nature and the implications of otherness.

## Chapter Seven

### Postscript

#### 7.1 Critical Language Awareness in the Context of *Learning, Language and Logic*

In 1992, the year following this study, the position of the CLA component was different in two respects, both of which were primarily a result of time constraints rather than because of any intrinsic problems with the CLA programme or because of new pedagogical insights. Firstly, it was placed at the end of the year rather than during the first eight weeks of the semester. Secondly, it was a shorter component which was taught in the context of discussion around “frames of reference” and where the focus was almost entirely on the grammatical structures and lexical choices of a range of texts drawn from the university context. This meant that whatever broader context the CLA tasks had originally had, was now entirely absent as were the activities designed to orientate first year students to the university (see 6.2.2). These latter tasks were clearly not necessary at this stage of the year but the omission of those developed to facilitate a broader understanding of the nature of text, which themselves had proved problematic (see 6.5.2), was a serious truncation of the programme and resulted in the textual analyses resembling traditional grammar lessons even more closely. To exacerbate the problem further, there was a substantial change in the tutoring team with the result that several tutors had little or no knowledge of CLA and, in most cases, had neither the time nor the inclination to rectify the matter. There was no sense in which we could claim any informed development or change to the programme at this stage - on the contrary what remained of it seemed to be simply appended to the rest of the course with little or no explicit function or purpose.

This unsatisfactory situation was clearly reflected in Aucock’s (1997) critical analysis of the writing component of *Learning, Language and Logic*. Writing as a Master’s student who had completed a Bachelor of Education degree in the Department of Applied Language Studies and



had also tutored in *Learning, Language and Logic*, she describes the CLA programme as “insightful and progressive” and then succinctly identifies the key problems:

Firstly, the critical language awareness programme is offered to students towards the **end** of the second semester, thus providing very little opportunity for students to experience practice in critical interaction not only with 3L texts but other university texts as well.

Secondly, the programme itself is limited in that very little time is given to an explanation of critical linguistic theory and critical discourse analysis. Instead, students work through a number of isolated exercises in which they are required to identify the “ideological” effect of certain lexical and grammatical features in a variety of different university texts. (1997: 108)

She ends her critique by affirming the value of CLA but broadens its role to include the academic staff as well as the students:

I believe that an understanding of critical linguistic theory and critical discourse analysis is fundamental not only to students but to the academic community as well. If transformation is to take place the expectation should be that both staff and students are able to critique the discursive practices constituting the order of discourse used within the university and when necessary embrace less traditional, alienating and disempowering practices. (1997: 109)

Although only a few cosmetic improvements were made to the programme during the past few years, these problems have now been seriously addressed, at least as far as the students are concerned. This year, the materials for *Learning, Language and Logic* (called *Academic Communication Studies* from 1998) have been completely redesigned by MacDonald (1998a and 1998b; see Chapter One, endnote 2), who, as a consultant to the Department of Applied Language Studies at the University of Natal, has included a large and extremely well developed component in CLA and CDA. It has been inserted immediately after a section entitled “Text in Context” which is based on Halliday’s (1985) Systemic-Functional Grammar (see 3.5.2). Practical exercises (Macdonald 1998b, see Appendix U), which have been derived almost entirely from the tasks and texts at the centre of this study, are framed by a substantial chapter in the reader on language and power (MacDonald 1998a; see Appendix T) which includes

discussion of, for example, subjectivity, positioning and agency. MacDonald explains the process from her point of view:

To make sense of why I included CLA in the course I need to reflect a bit on my decision to make use of the Hallidayan framework in Unit Nine. The purpose of this was to give students the experience of getting to grips with the syntax and lexis of text in context, rather than their previous experience of doing grammar exercises using discrete sentences . . . I could not stop there because the Hallidayan paradigm seemed static. It did not present a space for challenge or sufficient space for student voice . . . the voices of those from the Southern Hemisphere, those who do not belong to the dominant paradigm, those who hold indigenous knowledge systems that have not been legitimised and might be able to enrich the way knowledge is currently constructed. And the way to do this seemed to take the Hallidayan tools to a logical conclusion and add to them the whole notion of power relations and make it clear that to bring about change, the students themselves can develop a sense of agency and use their position as writers to introduce their own voices into the historically western dominated academic culture. (Personal correspondence, July 1998)

In conjunction with this newly developed component, which is placed, for logistical and theoretical reasons (see Gee 1996), during the second semester, I will run training workshops in CLA and CDA for the tutors to ensure that they have the opportunity to acquire a grounding in the basic principles of the approach.

These recent developments represent several years of reflection about the place and value of CLA in the context of *Learning, Language and Logic*. They are also a result of an increased application of Hallidayan linguistics in South African university language classrooms. There is no question that the materials are now informed by a far more solid theoretical base and that the practical tasks are scaffolded in such a way that students can analyse texts in their broader contexts. In time, student evaluation will indicate the extent to which they are appropriate and relevant to their particular learning needs.

## 7.2 The Role of Critical Language Awareness in Post-Apartheid South Africa

In recent years, there has been considerable debate over whether or not there is still a useful role for CLA. Esterhuysen, for example, mounts a strong argument against its use, claiming that in “a weary and damaged society” (1994: 51) it can be irresponsible to implement an approach to language teaching which could, used “for the advancement of personal agendas . . . contribute to a classroom mentality that sees a conspiracy in every word and a trap in every text” (1994: 57).

Morrow (cited in Janks 1995) also argues against its usefulness. His concern is not so much the condition of the “national psyche” (Esterhuysen 1994: 57) but the fact that he believes that undergraduate students are in dire need of what he calls the “basic literacy skills” (in Janks 1995: 101) which are required to understand text and not the critical skills needed to de-construct it. For yet another reason Granville (1996), who has been involved in innovative research using CLA, has recognised that the use of CDA (and by extension CLA) may now be constrained in South Africa. She acknowledges how the changes in the society have produced a culture of loyalty rather than one of resistance and with it, new uncertainties. Explaining her own experience, she says

When I started to think about this project, the challenge was relatively straightforward: the enemy was apartheid and I could play my part as a “subversive” teacher by encouraging my students to resist the power of print and in so doing resist oppression. Now something different may be called for. (1996: 200)

An assessment of the current situation needs to take two broad arguments into account: one which focuses primarily on the learning needs of students; the other which is concerned more with the new socio-political dispensation in South Africa. Although interrelated, they will be dealt with separately here.

In relation to the first argument, Morrow’s assertion about the need for “basic” rather than “critical” skills, most especially for second language speakers, represents a frequently expressed opinion among language teachers. This position, however, assumes an unproblematic divide between the “basic” and the “critical” domains. The tension between the two kinds of processes

is certainly one recognised by many teachers and was a debate at the heart of this study (see 4.3.2). Indeed, CLA itself incorporates both domains. While teachers committed to CLA would not welcome the collapse of CLA into the teaching of discrete grammatical structures (see 6.5.2), it can, and sometimes does, function primarily as a method of teaching basic grammar as well as providing a useful tool for critical analysis. The point here is that the “basic” and “critical” processes are not mutually exclusive; they are not even discrete but rather exist in relationship to each other. University students are required to both understand and to engage in the critical analysis of academic text and the relationship between these processes is complex and difficult to disentangle. Moreover, students need a sense of the broader context of the text which is a crucial part of its meaning. Janks agrees that many students find the basic reading of a text a difficult process but, drawing on Fairclough (1989), nevertheless insists that

understanding any text, particularly tertiary level texts, is not simply about understanding the English - the words on the page. It is at least as much about understanding the generic organisation of the text as well as the discourses which frame it. We need to offer students a range of ways for making sense of what they read; both bottom up and top down processing strategies offered by Applied Linguistics and the careful attention to form, discursive context and social context offered by critical discourse theory. (1995: 103)

As she points out, it is CLA that can facilitate the critical competence which is required in conjunction with more “basic” skills and which can help to prevent a mechanistic and uncritical response to text. In a different context, and in relation to the writing process, Clark and Ivanič make a similar point about the complexity of written text. In a discussion which highlights the multifunctional analysis of context of situation (Halliday 1985), they insist that

Writing is not simply the translation of a set of ideas into words, dependent only on ideational meaning. It is also a social interaction, and has to convey the identity of the writer, the writer’s assessment of the reader(s) and the relationship between them. These interpersonal aspects of the meaning are in turn affected by the writer’s sense of the power relationships involved . . . (1997: 66)

It is this complexity which is diminished if the focus remains on “basic skills” and, with Janks, Clark and Ivanič would assert that one of the ways in which to assist learners to hold the various

aspects of meaning in tension is through the understanding and application of the principles of CLA.

The second argument is in response to claims around the changed socio-political dispensation in South Africa. Once again, Janks' contribution is useful. In a paper entitled *1996: Why we still need Critical Language Awareness in South Africa* (1996) she foregrounds the recent changes to the South African socio-political context and admits that, for the teaching of CLA, this has meant new difficulties. Drawing on the work of Vološinov, she concedes that

Critical de-construction is easier when the sign is unstable and the contest over meaning is out in the open. It was easy to demonstrate the need for critical literacy in the apartheid era. Critical analysis is more difficult and its necessity is less apparent in times of re-construction and stability, in times when ideology is naturalised and the struggle over the sign is less obvious. (1996: 1)

This position warrants further comment. It is certainly true that processes of political opposition in apartheid South Africa were marked by sharply drawn lines of contestation which were further clarified by the sheer weight of legislation which buffered and perpetuated the apartheid system. In this context, socio-political battles over the unstable sign were highly visible and relatively easy to define. The shift to an apparently more stable social context, however, does not, as Janks suggests, imply the increasing stability of the sign and the correspondingly more difficult task for the critical linguist. The contest over the sign may not be as immediately apparent but if anything, within post-apartheid South Africa, the sign is less stable than ever, existing as it does in the postmodern context of plurality, contradiction and difference (see 2.1). Further, it is simplistic to assume, as Esterhuysen seems to, that because South Africa has had a change of government that all the injustices of the past have disappeared. The demise of apartheid is *not* synonymous with the eradication of racism and, as Janks observes, “no society is free of oppressive relations of power” (1996:1). Also, now, after the euphoria of the election in 1994, stronger strands of resistance are beginning to emerge - the culture of loyalty mentioned by Granville (1996) is also confronting the starker social realities - with unemployment, poverty and continued lack of equitable educational provision just three among them. It remains true that the focussed, often furious struggles against the highly visible legalised apartheid structures have disappeared. However, it is precisely because continuing injustices are more difficult to identify,

because they are now more subtly hidden within new discourses, that CLA has an even more crucial role to play. MacDonald would agree with this position. Justifying her inclusion of CLA in the newly developed *Academic Communication Studies*, she is adamant that “in this time of transformation . . . it was important not to allow the course to stop without creating a bit of discomfort that will keep minds open to change and new possibilities” (1998c, written correspondence.).

### 7.3 Conclusion

This thesis began by highlighting the fluid and dynamic social conditions currently experienced by South Africa and, within this, recalling the challenges issued to South African universities by Gerwel (1987) and Khanyile (1986) regarding their role in the transformation of educational institutions during this period of transition. This rapidly developing and exciting process, then in its infancy, continues to impact on every aspect of social, political and public life. Within this context, the full implications of the university of Natal’s Mission Statement continue to emerge, and, while some exciting initiatives are already in place, there are complex and potentially conflictual processes yet to be completed. Contesting voices of both a conservative and a radical nature, from within and outside the institution, will inevitably render the process a long and complicated one. Despite these constraints, however, there is no doubt that the university must change its practices, including its discursive practices, in diverse and fundamental ways if it is to meet the requirements of the new South African dispensation. Whether it is able to fully implement its Mission Statement, to translate it into institutional practices acceptable to all its stakeholders, will only gradually become evident.

For the foreseeable future, the University of Natal will face constant challenges both from within and from the communities it is attempting to serve. It will be required to position itself effectively and flexibly in relation to a wide range of new and different demands, many of which will continue to threaten and undermine traditionally held values and assumptions and all of which will permeate every aspect of the life of the institution. In an evaluation of the Critical Language Studies Programme, which is at the centre of this thesis, a black, female student said, “The CLS tutorial always make me feel as one who also form a great part at university”

(C2/S19). How best to achieve this for all students in terms of understanding claims like this is an indispensable first step which has been precisely the focus of this study. As university educators redefine every facet of the institution, the numerous and complex implications of this apparently simple statement need to inform the crucial decisions which will shape our future.

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