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2008

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Publication Details

Jones, P. (2008). F. Christie & J.R. Martin (eds), Language, knowledge and pedagogy: Functional linguistic and sociological perspectives. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31 (2), 241-245.

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Abstract

Arising from the productive dialogue between systemic functional linguistics and sociology begun earlier by Michael Halliday (1995), Basil Bernstein (1990) and Ruqaiya Hasan (1999), this edited volume is concerned with the nature of knowledge. Readers familiar with Bernstein's sociological theory will know the trajectory of his work from its early emphasis on code, through classification and framing of curriculum to his later interest in the structuring of knowledge. Throughout, his interest in the relationship between social relations and semiotic practice is evident as he attended firstly to the form taken by pedagogic discourse (the relay) and then later to the pedagogic discourse and knowledge itself (the relayed).

Keywords

language, knowledge, pedagogy, linguistic, perspectives, functional, sociological, martin, f, r, christie, j, eds

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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○ **F. CHRISTIE & J.R. MARTIN (EDS),
*LANGUAGE, KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGY:
 FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTIC AND
 SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES***
 (LONDON, CONTINUUM. 2007. PP. XIII, 267)

Arising from the productive dialogue between systemic functional linguistics and sociology begun earlier by Michael Halliday (1995), Basil Bernstein (1990) and Ruqaiya Hasan (1999), this edited volume is concerned with the nature of knowledge. Readers familiar with Bernstein's sociological theory will know the trajectory of his work from its early emphasis on code, through classification and framing of curriculum to his later interest in the structuring of knowledge. Throughout, his interest in the relationship between social relations and semiotic practice is evident as he attended firstly to the form taken by pedagogic discourse (the relay) and then later to the pedagogic discourse and knowledge itself (the relayed).

It is the later work with which this book engages, most particularly the development of the initial categorisations of everyday and commonsense knowledge into those of vertical and horizontal discourses (Bernstein, 1999). Horizontal discourse, according to Bernstein, is associated with everyday or commonsense knowledge. Usually acquired in sites of primary enculturation like home and community, such knowledge is "likely to be oral, local, context-dependent and specific, tacit" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). Learning to tie one's shoelaces and learning to use the lavatory are examples of the skills/knowledges acquired in local, face-to-face settings through relationships with "a strong affective loading as in the family, peer group or local community" (Bernstein, 1999, p.161). By contrast, vertical discourse realises more specialised forms of knowledge, is acquired in sites of secondary enculturation such as schools and workplaces, and tends to attract official evaluation. Vertical discourse, according to Bernstein, has two forms: the systematically principled, hierarchically organised discourses of science, and the series of specialised languages and methods of interrogation of the social sciences. These two forms are described respectively as hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures. Hierarchical knowledge structures such as those of physics create a few, very general theoretical propositions and become increasingly abstract as new ideas are integrated. Horizontal knowledge structures such as those of literary criticism and sociology are "serially ordered": that is, they grow as new specialised languages are added. These distinctions

are useful in understanding knowledge, language and pedagogy. As Frances Christie asks in the final chapter of the book, “The fundamental issue that faces us for pedagogy is: how do we make it possible for people to move from horizontal to vertical discourse?” (p. 241).

Christie’s introductory chapter provides a concise history of Bernstein’s sociology and Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) and of the dialogue between the two. From an educationist and linguist who has long worked with both theories in the context of classroom discourse and literacy pedagogy (see Christie, 2002), this brief chapter has a clarity and succinctness that prepares the way for the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, sociologists Johan Muller and Karl Maton offer a more detailed guide to the development of Bernstein’s theory, demonstrating its trajectory to this later concern with knowledge, its structure, and its transformation across fields. While this chapter is recommended to readers new to Bernstein’s work (his own writing presents a challenging read for many), Muller and Maton caution that any account of Bernstein’s oeuvre is partial because “he was always reworking and recasting his ideas” (p. 14).

In Chapter 3, Jim Martin, who has also had a lengthy association with Bernstein’s work (see Martin, 1999), provides a functional linguistics perspective on discourse and knowledge structures by interpreting them with reference to field. As a consequence, the linguistic manifestations of vertical discourses – forms of grammatical metaphor – are able to be identified with reference to the disciplines of history and science, discourses which have “the power to consume our ecosystem (via technology) and manage populations (via bureaucracy)” (p. 61). Martin points out that the object of the work represented in this volume is not to merge the two theories or their knowledge structures, but rather to produce a “shared political commitment, especially with a focus on education”.

Much of Chapter 4 is concerned with exploring differences in knowledge structures associated with vertical discourses, and touches on a number of familiar concerns. Muller addresses what he describes as “the contemporary avoidance of knowledge structure” (p. 83), providing an analysis of recent South African curriculum renewal, a process in which sequence and progression in pedagogy were minimalised at precisely the point when teachers needed such a map. Like Martin, Muller raises the issue of teacher knowledge, arguing that teachers need a sound grasp of the conceptual structure of their subject.

In Chapter 5, Karl Maton argues that hierarchical arrangements are relevant to “knower” as well as “knowledge” structures. He describes a UK project aimed at understanding the decline in popularity of Music as a subject from early primary years where it is popular, to later at GCSE levels where it was taken by only a small proportion of

students. The analysis reveals the shifts from an emphasis on the “knower” early in schooling to “knowledge” in the middle years to an emphasis on both “knower” and “knowledge” at GCSE level (a point at which it is seen as an “elite” subject). This chapter helps understand how actors as well as discourses are specialised in fields, and therefore how forms of “identity and consciousness” (p. 104) are shaped.

In Chapter 6, Rob Moore addresses the crucial ideas of “the canon” and relativism, arguing its place as a product of collective reasoning and judgement across time and space. He points out that in the canon, it is knowledge, not the knower (and their preferences and opinions), which counts.

The chapters above comprise the first section of the volume, elaborating and extending the theoretical foundations of Bernstein’s work. While I generally found the linguistic contributions more accessible than the sociological, perseverance is rewarded because this section lays the conceptual groundwork for the next. The second section explores the concepts of horizontal and vertical discourse from the perspective of SFL across a range of applications, including early language development, school curriculum and the nature of disciplinary knowledge. Its chapters offer much to educationist-readers.

Clare Painter, in Chapter 7, explores the linguistic nature of horizontal discourse as it is found in the lives of young children, and considers how this discourse changes over time. This is an important chapter for grounding a number of important claims of Bernstein’s in language use and development. Significantly, she also points out something of the constraints of horizontal discourse in dealing with learning in later childhood, thus reminding us of important differences between sites of primary and secondary enculturation.

Frances Christie and Mary Macken-Horarik consider the nature of subject English in Chapter 8, providing a careful description of this curriculum area as a horizontal knowledge structure with weak grammars, segmentally organised in a series of specialised language “wherein what counts as achievement is adoption of a particular pedagogic position” (p. 157). The identification of a number of models or languages of English, including Multiliteracies and Functional Language Studies, encourages useful reflection for language educators. Christie and Macken-Horarik argue that over time subject English has drifted toward an invisibility of content (with the exception of Functional Language Studies) and a shift away from teaching knowledge about language explicitly. Thus at the same time as the tacit acquisition of certain skills and dispositions is valued, students are frequently stranded without tools for examining texts.

In Chapter 9, Peter Wignell examines the discourse of the social sciences to demonstrate Bernstein’s description of the growth of the discipline. Social science began as a

“hybrid of languages of the humanities and of the physical sciences”, with the language patterns of the physical sciences becoming more and more prominent until it fractured into smaller knowledge structures, some of which are horizontal (for example, Political Science) and others (for example, Economics) are hierarchical.

The final chapter of this section is a capstone one in which Kay O’Halloran addresses the discourses of science and mathematics from a systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA) perspective: that is, she examines how linguistic, visual and symbolic resources function to produce mathematical and scientific discourse. She suggests that these two disciplines, despite having different knowledge structures, complement each other with the effect that Science can go to work in the world, tied to political, economic and military agendas. Turning to the crisis in Mathematics and Science in schools, she reminds us that new teaching strategies are urgently needed, particularly for use with disadvantaged students. She offers the SF-MDA approach as a means of making visible to students something of the nature of mathematical and scientific knowledge.

The third and final section of the book is a future-orientated conversation among Martin, Christie, Maton and Muller. The topics range across a number of issues: revisiting some of the earlier chapters, raising questions, assisting the reader to interpret crucial theoretical constructs, and foreshadowing future research imperatives.

This volume is worthy of attention because its contributors are leading scholars in the traditions of SFL and Bernstein’s sociology, developing the ideas and applications further, expanding their descriptive and explanatory potential. The resulting “assuredness” with which the book reads, and the dialogic structuring of the chapters (there is a strong sense of progression throughout), assist the reader with its quite complex ideas and arguments. So too does its emphasis on application of theory to the empirical issues.

The book makes a valuable contribution to the fields of education and applied linguistics. It undoes the oppositional tendencies of terms such as “everyday” and “commonsense”, and offers instead more useful ways of thinking about different bodies of knowledge and the forms of discourse favoured by them. The applications to disciplinary knowledge make its international address clear. In the Australian educational context, this is a particularly timely volume for two reasons. It is critical preparatory reading for the reappraisal of official curriculum that must come with the move to national curriculum and national testing regimes. It also provides salutary warning of the problems of integrating curriculum currently evident in pedagogic trends such as “rich tasks” and “connected outcomes groups”.

This book is a valuable resource for teacher educators, curriculum developers and policy makers concerned with rigorously informed curriculum and pedagogy. Researchers

of language and education too will continue to reap benefits from what Jim Martin describes as “the negotiation of ideas initiated by Bernstein, Halliday and Hasan into a second generation of research” (p. 239).

Review by Pauline Jones, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong.

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