



UNIT SEVENTEEN

Belief and Action 2 Discourse and Power

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SECTION ONE

1. Introduction

Together, discourse and force are the chief means whereby social borders, hierarchies, institutional formations, and habituated patterns of behaviour are both maintained and modified. (Lincoln 1986:5.)

In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of the British rule in India, and the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*.

The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details.

(Orwell 1964: 153-4)

This unit follows Unit 16 in taking further the notion of discourses and how they are created through symbolic categorisation. It also takes further the use of ritual by looking at ritual language and the rhetoric of politicians. As in Unit 16 and previous units, the approach taken is a social constructivist one in which language and discourses are seen as constructing particular views of the world.

The unit encourages students to take a critical perspective on language use by considering how it reflects and helps to construct relations of domination. These may be obvious as when, for example, a parent scolds a child or a defendant is found guilty or innocent in a court of law. Or they may be indirect, for example, in the discourses around the standard language or the ways in which bureaucracies appear to be treating people as customers rather than applicants. Power enters into discourses and interactions in the most banal or intimate events of family life (see the Mars-Jones story which is the reading assignment) as well as into the manipulative rhetoric of politicians.

Whatever students pick as a theme for their ethnographic project, power relations are likely to play a part. This was very evident in Sophie's study of the Carnivaliers in Nice who denied the full title to the women who worked for the Carnival. Similarly, the discourses of the transvestite prostitutes in Cadiz reflected their peripheral status within the wider society. Taking some ideas from critical discourse analysis, this unit encourages students to analyse the ways in which ideology and myth work through lexis and the grammatical system as well as through more obvious ways of controlling others through turn-taking procedures and other rituals.

2. Links with other units

The obvious link is with the previous unit but there are other links with themes that recur throughout the course. Relatively early on, in Unit 3, the video of the school staff meeting shows how gendered use of space works alongside a male style of categorical speech to produce a dominant male view. Other aspects of sexual politics are taken up in Unit 6. Units 9-12 and Unit 14 focus, respectively, on interpretive analysis which requires a close look at the language and discourse of informants and this links with the critical discourse analysis approach introduced, rather briefly, here. The power of myth-making discourse is touched on in the Essential History of Europe video used in Unit 13 where the ideology of banal practices is first introduced in the discourses about 'the nation'.

3. Background notes

Linking to the previous unit on symbolism and symbolic classification, this unit looks at some aspects of language as the most highly developed form of symbolism there is.

A thread running through many of the units of this course is the capacity of language to (1) categorise the world in certain ways – to give us a particular world view – and so not only label the world symbolically but give certain values as pre-eminent and (2) to create and sustain social relations through its symbolic power.

Both of these aspects of language are concerned with power, more generally, and with ideology. This unit combines thinking by a group called critical linguists with the ethnographic methods developed in this course. Throughout this unit, we will continually be referring to certain dichotomies which may be quite familiar by now:

natural v. ideological
neutral v. critical
symbolic v. functional
myth v. reality

In their own way, each one is trying to shock us out of our taken-for-granted, complacent, unthinking way of looking at the world and going about our business. These dichotomies are used to help us unlearn many of our assumptions and solipsistic views of ourselves and others, to help us read between the lines and see not only new meanings but meanings which reveal how our lives and those of our informants are always implicated in power relations. To do this, we need to examine the two key notions of **discourse** and **ideology**.

Discourse

We can define discourse, very roughly, as systematic ways of talking and knowing to express particular values. Discourses define, delimit and describe what it is possible to say and not to say (and by extension what it is possible, or not, to do) (Kress 1985). We can think about 'discourse' in three broad ways:

1. The Anglo-American tradition that defines discourse as situated language use, e.g. how do people take turns? How does a text hang together? How do people structure information in talk? (see, for example, the handout on communicative style in Unit 14 as one way of looking at distinctive discourse strategies).
2. The Continental tradition which defines discourse more broadly as the systematic organisation of meanings and values in talk. The study of discourse at this level focuses on how such meanings come to be produced and circulated in talk (Foucault 1972). The 'orders of discourse' which regulate our lives govern what is allowable to be said and define knowledge in particular ways. So, for example, in the modern world we have a set of discourses about the 'mentally ill' or 'discipline' which produce certain kinds of knowledge and gives them particular values. Foucault's accounts of the development of the clinic and the prison demonstrate how human conditions become medicalised and criminalised along with the tools of the trade including surveillance, forms of gaze and knowledge/power.
3. The power relations that exist behind discourse but which are reflected and created in it.

A good example of these three levels comes from Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989:44-5). He transcribes an interaction between a doctor and a group of medical students. The doctor interrupts the student on several occasions to take control of his contributions. He also opens the interaction by stating what the purpose of it is and he instructs the student to start the examination. Once the student has made a few contributions, the doctor either evaluates his performance or puts him on the spot with a series of questions. Fairclough discusses how the doctor uses his power not only to control what is said and done but to control his *relationship* to this student (and perhaps all students) and so the *subject position* the student(s) occupies. The different means of control are examples of level one: situated language use, but they also construct the meanings and values of a society which positions doctors and their medical discourse as part of the dominant group. The student is clearly in a subordinate position to the doctor but is learning the discourses which will soon give her or him an authoritative voice in relation to her or his patients and possibly the wider community. So all three levels just introduced are retrievable from this data. But although the doctor is controlling the interaction, it is not done in an obviously direct way as a sergeant-major might control his platoon on the parade ground by bellowing at them. The control mechanisms are largely indirect and depend upon the conventions of this discourse type.

Ideology

Power is increasingly exercised through ideology rather than force and works through language and discourse. Ideology, Althusser argues, is a system of representations which present the social world from a particular point of view. It is a particular set of values and beliefs which function as common-sense assumptions, e.g. 'doctors know best and can tell me what to do'; 'standard French or English is the best and/or correct way of speaking'; 'the two-parent family is the only natural way of bringing up children' and so on. Because these assumptions appear as common sense, they disguise their ideological base, the fact that they are only one

way, the dominant way, of seeing things. They come across as natural and neutral, the only way of doing things, and that is why they are so powerful. Ideologies are conveyed and constructed through discourse and so discourse becomes a means of control. As Lincoln, following Gramsci, would say, it is discourse, not force, which controls society.

One set of ideologies is reproduced in the discourses of language and nation (see also Unit 13). Blommaert and Verschueren (1992) discuss the common sense views that seem widely held in western Europe that the best society is one where there is one language and no intergroup differences and where language is a straightforward marker of national and ethnic identity. These ideologies are not explicitly stated but function, like most ideologies, implicitly. Discussions about standard English and the routine use of specialised professional language in the law, medicine, politics and so on are good examples of how language functions ideologically.

The standard variety of a language is maintained and given value by ideology. There is no natural reason why the standard should dominate or be thought of as better than any other variety except that the 'ruling apparatus' has defined it as such. The standard, used by the dominant professional classes and the state, is developed to manage complex, abstract, accurate thinking as in scientific discourse. As was mentioned in Unit 14, this type of rational, abstract, decontextualised talk – what Scollon and Scollon (1995) call the 'Utilitarian Discourse System' – requires of its speakers a long apprenticeship. Those who do not acquire it are excluded from the most powerful and well paid jobs. But, as well as a means of systematic exclusion, this rationalised discourse system:

separates speakers from sensitivity to actual situations. Such an alienation from concrete realities can result in failed ethical engagement and moral action in the world. The crucial point in this, of course, is this mode of orientation to the world is now richly embodied in the lexical and grammatical structure of the language itself - especially in the standard language of the dominant class strata. (Lucy 1996:61)

We see this in the bureaucratic encounters such as the interviews with the housing officer in Unit 14 where the middle class applicant knew the jargon of 'hard to let housing areas'. This type of language 'manufactures indifference' (Herzfeld 1992). We see it in the discourse of academic texts and in the state discourses of war: for example, the notion of 'collateral damage' being used to describe the bombing of civilian targets and the killing of ordinary people (and see the Orwell quote above). These discourses mean that certain interpretations or readings are preferred, certain words used while others excluded. This is most evident and influential in the media where, for example, there is talk and writing of 'Palestinian terrorists' or 'black rioters'. These kinds of discourse are produced as if they were natural and neutral and were simply functioning to convey information rather than acting symbolically to represent certain values, feelings and world views. They tend to create a consensus – 'everybody knows ...' – and as the quote from Lucy above shows, this consensus is actually built in to the dominant variety of language, the standard. The media, like

all other institutions, has its own discourses for classifying and representing the world and so excluding certain people and certain ways of thinking:

[All institutions depend upon] a linguistic edifice of classification, concepts and imperatives for individuals' actions. (Berger and Berger 1972:67)

The idea of powerful discourses as excluding is explored through Bloch's study (1975) of ritual language, especially in oratory, song and dance. Ritual language is constrained in many ways, including, in the kind of oratory in rural communities that Bloch studied, fixed loudness patterns and other special styles of delivery. He asks the question why this kind of formal language is a kind of power. And his answer is that the authority of the speakers cannot be challenged because their discourses pervade the ways of thinking and doing that are available for such challenges. Criticisms from the non-powerful are only effective if conveyed in just those authoritative discourses that the dominated groups wish to challenge. For example, abseiling into the House of Commons shouting slogans of protest may catch the attention of the media for a moment but will not change the ritual means of 'doing power' in parliament. Slogan shouting is not part of the powerful discourse and so is dramatic but ultimately ineffective.

Oratory, or the use of rhetoric to persuade, remains, of course, one of politicians' most effective tools. The rhetoric of the politician's speeches is the means of governing not through force but discourse. Such discourse involves ideological persuasion and the evocation of feelings. Thatcher's famous 'This Lady's not for Turning' is an example. She presents herself as strong, 'the Iron Lady' as she was often called, and consistent both in terms of the argument and as a person. She also calls up the name of the play 'The Lady's not for Burning' by Christopher Fry, thus evoking the Shakespearean period of glory and splendour for England.

The use of rhetoric to persuade was studied by the sociologist, Max Atkinson (1984). In particular, he analysed the use of 'clap-trap' – a trick designed to catch applause. A clip from the documentary on his studies is used in this unit to illustrate one way in which power is created through discourse.

As Thatcher's rallying call shows, one of the most powerful ways in which ideology works through discourse is through myth, in her case, the myth of a strong, powerful, unified England. Roland Barthes in his essays on myth and mythologies was an early critic of the idea that language was in some way natural or a neutral means of communication. In *Mythologies* (1972), he analyses the 'myths' of French mass culture which purport to present an objective reality but which, analysis reveals, present a bourgeois set of values and meanings. The signs and symbols of this culture work to mystify and mask the values and assumptions of the ruling elite and to draw readers and consumers into a consensus that this is the right and natural way. Le Wita's study of Parisian Bourgeois culture used in Unit 6 is just such an example of myth-making. Adam Mars-Jones' short story which is the essential reading for this unit is an ironic take on the myths that are played out beneath the surface and which reflection and analysis can uncover. Students should not take this story seriously but as Mars-Jones implies, there are serious myths here which resonate with modern sexual politics.

Language works as a form of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991) in a linguistic marketplace. It is a kind of cultural capital which allows there to be 'legitimate speakers' who can perform certain tasks, such as the orators of Bloch's study, and others who do not count as legitimate. So, speaking the right words does not of itself give authority: the words have to be spoken by legitimate speakers. For example, 'I pronounce you man and wife' only has force when spoken by a legitimate speaker, a priest or appropriate representative of the civic authority. Discourses are powerful and 'make' people in a number of ways but there are also relations of power behind discourses which make speaker's or writer's language powerful.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysts are a group of linguists including Fairclough (1989,1992), Fowler and Kress (1979) in Britain, van Dijk (1987) in the Netherlands and Wodak (1996) in Austria, influenced by the French critical thinkers Foucault, Althusser and Bourdieu, the Frankfurt School and the work of the Italian, Antonio Gramsci. The main objective of CDA is to use detailed discourse analysis to demystify the processes of language which mask the underlying ideology of talk and texts. The main focus has been on the media and other texts such as school course-books and policy documents but there have been some studies of typical institutional unequal encounters such as medical rounds and consultations (see the example from Fairclough above and Handout 1), school classrooms and what are now widely called gatekeeping interviews.

Those working within CDA argue that a close analysis of the vocabulary, grammar and syntax and structures of the interactions and texts provides explanations for the ways in which discourses maintain and create power and power relations (see assignment). Fairclough (1989 and 1992) argues that discourses constitute three areas of social life: representations of the world, social relations between people and social identities. So, for example, in the setting mentioned above, where the consultant is socialising student doctors into doctoring discourses, his use of language and interactional strategies illustrates these three areas. The world is represented as one where doctors display authoritative knowledge and where there are unquestioned routines for neo-natal examinations. The social relations between the consultant and students are ones of master and apprentice. He uses the declarative mode to give instructions to the students, he evaluates them publicly and interrupts their talk. This, in turn, positions the students as relatively powerless but also privileged in that the consultant is teaching them so that they are socialised into the elite world of medical practitioners. So, their social identity is constructed as student doctors: learning and disciplined and relatively powerless now, but with a future ahead of them. For example, at the end of the extract, the consultant uses 'we' to talk about what the next stage of the examination should be.

Critical discourse analysts often take the data of 'gatekeeping encounters' to expose the dominant discourses of institutional life. A 'gatekeeping' interview is one in which a professional or bureaucrat has the power or not to give access to scarce resources – a job, state housing or educational advice, for example – and where the decision depends upon the way in which the applicant's behaviour is judged. Typically, as we have suggested, institutions have their own discourses and styles of communicating

which are often at odds with those of the applicants (Erickson and Shultz 1982, Roberts 2000 and see Unit 14).

Discourses and Practices

Fairclough and others working in critical linguistics view language as a social practice. In other words, language cannot be separated off from the situations, institutions and structures in which it is embedded. But language also helps to constitute these situations, institutions and structures. For language learners as ethnographers, the focus on language as practice is particularly important. It moves them on from the Cultural Studies approach which tends to focus on written texts or on more abstract knowledge/power discourses in the Foucauldian sense. Practices can be defined as the social behaviour of our everyday lives and the folk models and ideologies which underpin them (Hymes 1974, Barton 1994). For example, the 'paseo' or regular evening walk down the main street of a Spanish town is more than a functional leg-stretching exercise before dinner. Traditionally, it was a way in which families could be seen together and young men and women could manage the business of early courtship without honour being lost (Gilmore 1977). In this sense of the word 'practice', social practices may be made up of many different discourses, for example the discourses of shame and honour, of family life and of neighbourly interaction. Similarly, the discourse of family will be acted out in many different family practices such as meal times, celebrations, family rows and so on.

So, students while abroad will participate in many different practices, some of which may be fleeting exchanges and others more substantial speech events (see Unit 14). In previous units, we have demonstrated the need for sensitivity to the language of informants (Units 9-12 and 14) and students have been alerted to the difference between actual language practices – what their informants do with language – and data from interviews, where informants talk about their practices and beliefs. It is possible that informant ideology is more apparent in their interviews than in their day to day behaviour but the focus on this unit is on the ideology and hidden power relations in any bit of talk and interaction. So the critical approach outlined above adds a further dimension to the questioning and reflexive frame of mind emphasised throughout the course.

The theme of this unit – ideology, myth and ritual as displayed and constructed through discourse – aims to show students how language acts as a mystifying agent to perpetuate the social and political status quo (Lincoln 1989). This theme challenges the idea that language is some neutral tool through which ideas, facts and instructions are clearly and unproblematically conveyed. Language hides as much as it reveals, constructs as much as it conveys and does so, not from some objective standpoint, but from within relations of power.

Student projects

The extent to which students take a critical stance in their projects will depend on how much background they have already in critical and cultural studies. For those with a strong theoretical background, a more critical ethnography is possible in which power relations are explored through informants' use of language. Most students will have at least some understanding of discourse and should, as a result of this unit,

be able to make connections between discourse and power. For example, Rachel carried out her ethnographic projects with blind students in Marburg, Germany. She worked with two different sets of discourses: those about disability as presented by the state and the media, and the discourses that the blind students used about themselves. In many ways, these discourses were in conflict. The blind students often talked of independence, of cutting ties with the family whereas the state discourses focused more on support.

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SECTION TWO

1. Outline of a session

1. Introduction
2. Discourse and myth
3. Critical discourse analysis
4. Assignment: Critical Eavesdropping
5. Ritual Language and rhetoric: 'Clap-trap'
6. Summary and links with the year abroad

2. Description of a session

2.1 Introduction

A brief summary of 'discourse' and 'ideology' and the links between 'symbolic classification' as presented in Unit 16 and the idea of language as symbolic power (see Background Notes), i.e. the idea that classificatory systems are ideologically based. Some students may well be aware of the Continental tradition of discourse and will be able to use their knowledge to illustrate the concept to the rest of the class.

Students need to be aware that ideology, and the exercise of power through language, can be present in the most banal and everyday of interactions and signs, from 'Keep off the Grass' notices to the formal and ritual encounters of the law court or a coronation. Remind students of the power of the media to 'imagine communities' raised in Unit 13 and of the ways in which advertising calls up idyllic narratives. For example, the Campbell soup ads draw on bucolic myths of nature, fecundity and freshness to sell cans of soup!

Somewhere between the banal and the highly formalised are the 'gatekeeping' interviews typical of institutional life and something that students are likely to face, even if in relatively informal and unimportant ways, when establishing themselves as residents when abroad. Remind students of the housing interview shown in Unit 14 where the white applicant knows the discourses of the housing department and the 'rational' mode of behaving as compared with the black applicant who brings his feelings into the encounter in order to get some kind of response from the housing officer. The point is that the calm, rational mode that the Scollons call the Utilitarian Discourse System (1995) is the dominant mode and the one by which all applicants are judged.

2.2 Discourse and myth

The capacity of language to call up stories, narratives which embody a popular idea and which have a powerful hold over people's imagination. Discuss the reading assignment 'Structural Anthropology' by Adam Mars-Jones, in particular the three

questions set. Relate back the idea of opposites as a way of structuring the world to the Sahlins reading in Unit 16 where the contrast of inner/outer is focal.

Make the point that myths are one of the ways (along with ideology and ritual) for mystifying. The myths of modern society, most potent in the advertising world, work, as Barthes has shown, by stripping the signs and symbols of their original context and infusing them with new meanings which support the social and political status quo. Almost any advert can be used to make this point. For example, the choice of 'Hob Nob' for a fairly ordinary wheat biscuit was designed to conjure up myths of cosy, chatting, relaxed occasions. To 'hobnob' is to drink together, to be on familiar terms. The hob is associated with cooking and the fireside and the rhyme calls up nursery rhymes of the 'Hob shoe hob' variety. The myths are potent because often only half recalled, evoking feeling rather than any particular memory, personal or collective.

Mars-Jones cleverly inverts this process by using the myths of sex and marriage to strike a feminist blow. He forces the reader to delve deep into the structural oppositions which 'glue' society together, to push for meaning and then find further meaning in that meaning. But the myths of hearth and home are used here to subvert rather than to sustain the status quo. The wife has not only cut free from her straying husband but she has made him the butt of ridicule. She has used the myths of sex to make him impotent (at least temporarily) and in doing so has achieved a kind of potency herself.

The idea of this reading is to help students to push their 'ethnographic imagination' and search for meaning in even the most banal activities and discourses. Part of their understanding of the particular group they are studying may stem from the way in which this group interacts with popular culture and the media more generally. Seeing the myth in the ordinary is part of the wider endeavour to shift away from the taken for granted view of reality.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduce the idea of critical discourse analysis, using Handout 1 and the comments on this piece of data given in the background notes. Connections with traditions in other languages such as the French *explication de texte* may be useful here and students of German may like to read some of the analysis done by Ruth Wodak and her associates in Austria (Wodak, R, de Cillia, R, Blümel, K and Amdraschako, E (1989) *Sprache und Macht*. Vienna: Deutike.)

Remind students of the ideas of classification in the previous unit and link these to the notion of ideology, i.e. that classificatory language configures the way we look at the world, our sentiments and beliefs. For example, the frequent collocation 'Islamic fundamentalism' works at several levels. It positions followers of Islam as fundamentalist; it links fundamentalism to Islam rather than other forms of fundamentalism so that even when 'fundamentalism' is used on its own, it conjures up narratives of Islam; and, because it is an abstract noun – an 'ism' – it encompasses any number of beliefs and activities, indeed myths, which need not be specified and which can grow to feed a continuing appetite for prejudice. And so on.

Similarly, as the Mars-Jones reading has already emphasised, the classification of social reality into oppositions is ideological. These systems of opposites – peace/violence, equality/inequality and so on – help to produce a consensus in society. For example, declarations of war (and decisions to use force even if not as openly declared as war) are often presented in oppositional terms as fighting for freedom versus tyranny, independence versus colonial repression etc. These classifications are ideological but, because they are so frequent and familiar, they appear normal and neutral.

Use the data of the doctor with student doctors and the analytic framework from Fairclough's *Language and Power* to look at the lexis (ways of classifying), grammar and structures of interaction. These three levels of analysis are used to think critically about what myths, narratives and assumptions the text creates, what social relations are evoked by the text and how the reader is positioned by the text. Students may be able to use this approach both in dealing with any 'gatekeeping' situations (see Background Notes) they may have to face, in participant observation where they can listen out for ideologically based classification systems used by informants and, in more detail, in the transcription of tape-recorded interviews with informants.

There is no time to introduce CDA properly but some students may already be familiar with a critical approach to discourse through French studies or through the Frankfurt School. The aim here is to help students develop the interpretive approach to data (see Units 11,12 and 14), putting a magnifying glass on the details of interaction and language and adding to this a critical awareness of the ideological function of language.

2.4 Discussion of the Critical Eavesdropping Assignment

In small groups, students can share the notes they have made from their bit of eavesdropping. Some of the things they should be looking out for are:

- ◆ Lexis: what classificatory systems did the speakers use? Did they depend upon a system of opposites? Were certain words or synonyms repeated? (Remember that whatever is important in the cultural practices of a group is richly lexicalised so the vocabulary of a language variety can be considered a kind of mental map of the preoccupations of a particular group)
- ◆ Grammar: what grammatical features did they notice? For example, were the speakers instructing each other, i.e. did they tell people to do things, or did they mitigate their language? Did they use lots of nominalisations?
- ◆ Larger structures: what turn-taking systems were used? Who controlled topic? Were there many interruptions? How did listeners show they were listening? (Remember the assignment in Unit 6 where similar processes were observed.)

Then, in the large group, relate some of these detailed processes to the idea of language and symbolic power, e.g. did these utterances have power because there was a 'legitimate speaker' speaking? And the local level politics of intimate

discourse, e.g. was there a degree of reciprocity in the conversation or was there a level of inequality?

2.5 Ritual language and rhetoric – ‘Clap-trap’

This item links some of the anthropological work on ritual with studies by conversation analysts on how political rhetoric manipulates audiences. Students should already be familiar with the ethnography of communication which, especially in its early years, tended to study formal, ritual events such as village ceremonies and public meetings, funerals, weddings and so on. Maurice Bloch's work on oratory in traditional societies is based on the same types of event but with a more critical focus on ritual language. The restricted vocabulary, reliance on certain syntactic forms, the special style of delivery with fixed patterns of intonation, register pitch and volume are all indicative of the ritualised language of oratory. Although such language is restricted, it has power since it is those with authority who speak it – the legitimate speaker in Bourdieu's terms – and who police the conventions. Those who might challenge it either use the non-powerful ordinary discourses which are ignored or have to use the very ‘powerful’ discourses which they wish to challenge. In this way, in all societies where power is not maintained by force, it is discourse that controls people.

The language of politics gives a ‘common-sense’ view realised through discourse. Because it is the language of powerful speakers, frequently repeated, it comes to be seen as the natural and ordinary way of seeing things. Politicians, bureaucrats, business leaders and many aspects of the media either speaking on their own behalf or because they represent institutions are, in an old but powerful term, ‘hidden persuaders’. They make statements but these are not messages conveying reality but acts of persuasion from a particular point of view. One of the most forceful and effective ways of persuading is through rhetoric. Some of the most common forms of ritual language are conventional rhetorical strategies such as wedding vows, the swearing in of juries and witnesses, police cautioning of suspects and so on. But the rhetoric of political language is less obviously conventional and the applause that such oratory receives is apparently the result of the ‘truth’ and ‘brilliance’ of the speakers.

There have been several studies of oratory and these have shown that the ability to influence crowds and, in particular, get them to applaud is based on a number of rhetorical strategies. Max Atkinson's study of the language and body-language of politics, *Our Master's Voices*, uses conversation analysis techniques to study the fine-grained detail of how politicians get their audiences to applaud. This final section of the unit is based on his analysis and a small segment of video showing the former Labour leader, Neil Kinnock's rhetorical skills, is used to illustrate some of his points. Use Handout 2 to go through some of the rhetorical strategies that politicians use and then show the video clip from the BBC documentary and the clip of Neil Kinnock.

2.6 Summary and links with the period abroad

This unit has looked at different ways of ‘doing power’ through discourse. This may be done through interactional strategies such as turn and topic control and

interruptions or through rhetoric as in the lists of three or contrastive pairs. The media is an obvious arena for exploring how discourse cloaks ideology and mystifies the listener/reader but, for ethnographers, the myths, rituals and ideologies of society can also be found in the everyday talk of ordinary people as the findings from the assignment should have shown. The wrap-up from this unit can also be used to draw together some of the principal themes of the course as a whole, e.g.:

- ◆ links between language and non-verbal communication;
- ◆ the idea of shared cultural knowledge as a way of forming identities and groups, to which must now be added a political/ power dimension as in sexual politics, the socialisation of the educational system and the inequalities of family life;
- ◆ the symbolic and constructed nature of social reality which challenges taken-for-granted ideas about the way the world is;
- ◆ the idea of language and everyday behaviour as providing patterns or maps which help us to understand how groups think and feel;
- ◆ the ritual elements of ordinary life which so often centre on reciprocity but which are also determined by the dominant groups in society;
- ◆ the habit of observing, listening and looking for meaning;
- ◆ the close detailed analysis of even the trivial and banal.

Remind students that the political and ideological language which they may be studying is not that of powerful politicians but is local and routine. Of course it is possible that a student might like to look at student politics where oratory is a feature or look at the meetings of community groups. For example, one Ealing student studied the local allotments and went to meetings run by the somewhat tyrannical secretary of the allotments. But most students should use this unit to bear in mind the power relations that exist in any community and to listen out for the hidden ideology behind their routine discourses.

3. Advice and Comments

The trick here is not to get too involved in discourse analysis but at the same time help students to appreciate that language is ideological and, at the level of lexis and grammar, always presents a point of view which excludes other ways of thinking and so, often, certain groups of people.

If students have already collected a lot of data for their home ethnography, they may wish to use some of this data for the assignment, provided that it is reasonably detailed linguistic data.

Both the Mars-Jones story and the 'clap-trap' analysis should illustrate for students that a lot can be inferred from even small amounts of data. This message does not contradict other messages in the course, for example, that lots of data should be collected and that there is a danger of 'high-inferencing' (see Units 11 and 12), but

should emphasise that a small bit of data can be worried away at like a terrier with an old slipper.

Student comment

(One student linked the 'purity and danger' concept in Unit 16 with the ritual discourses of Catholicism)... this reminds me of the education in areas such as sexual relations within the Catholic school system where not to know was an indication of purity.

SECTION THREE

1. Assignment

CRITICAL EAVESDROPPING

'[Ethnographers] ..learn to assume the strange status of accepted by-standers or professional overhearers' (Duranti: 101)

'Bystanders are those unratified participants who have some kind of... access to the encounter....Bystanders can be overhearers or eavesdroppers.' (Duranti: 300)

(Duranti, A 1997 *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

You have already had some practice in eavesdropping with a purpose. On this occasion, the act of eavesdropping may be much the same but the analysis of the data you collect will be a bit different. This time you should pay more attention to the detailed use of language of the 'eavesdropped' and consider in what ways the data gives you insights into underlying ideologies and power relations.

Example

The following conversation was overheard in a small restaurant in a relatively affluent suburb in West London. Two women with young children were discussing their 'au pairs'. One told the other how she had had to have a serious talk with her 'au pair' the week before. The young woman had invited a male friend into her bedroom without introducing him first to the family. The mother had admonished her for this lapse and had told her 'In England, if you are staying in someone else's house, you introduce any visitor to the head of the household'.

Following Fairclough (1989), we can look at this bit of eavesdropping in terms of three dimensions:

- content or knowledge/beliefs
- social relations
- social identities

And the features we can identify to help us analyse these dimensions are:

- lexis
- grammar
- wider structures and interactional conventions

Lexis

The speaker sets up an opposition between 'family' and 'visitor' in order to exclude the 'au pair' from the familial relations and place her in a category where, as a visitor, she cannot take things for granted. Like the 'guestworker' in Germany (see Unit 13), she is there on sufferance and can be asked to leave. This opposition is further enforced by the notion of seeking permission from 'the head of the household'. Traditionally, this has been the father and the term, therefore, is an ideological one – placing the man at the head as the symbol of authority and arbiter in all family matters. Of course, from this fragment, we cannot be sure that the

speaker is referring to her husband rather than herself. Perhaps more eavesdropping would throw light on this.

Grammar

What events and relationships are encoded by the grammar? In this case, the agent of the sentence 'You' is clear. There is no getting away from the responsibility the woman is laying on the 'au pair'. Similarly the modality of the sentence 'should' and lack of any mitigation or softeners shows that it is a clear imperative. It is not advice but a command.

Wider Structures and interactional conventions

It is difficult to say a lot from this little fragment but the speaker is obviously telling a narrative to, we can assume for the moment, someone who is likely to agree with her punch-line and support her in her troubles telling about 'au pairs'.

More eavesdropping might tell you about how these two interact together e.g. do they take turns in speaking or overlap and interrupt a lot? Do they re-formulate each other's utterances? And so on.

What features of the whole interaction would tell us that this is a conversation between friends? And are there any features that tell a different story?

Content, social relations and social identity

The ideological content is clear here: the speaker has certain views about family life and its maintenance. The social relations concern the relationship between the speaker and the subject of her talk and the speaker and listener. We can infer from this fragment that she considers herself as having authority over the 'au pair' whereas the fact that she is relating this anecdote, over coffee, to another woman suggests that she expects her listener to share a considerable amount of cultural knowledge with her, thus suggesting they are part of the same community (at least in some respects).

The social identity she expresses is that of a woman with both the means and the authority to employ an 'au pair'. Her unmitigated imperative to the 'au pair' and the fact that she is retelling this incident suggest that she is quite comfortable with this identity and the power relations that are re-enacted in the telling.

NOW GO OUT AND HAVE A GO AT THIS KIND OF EAVESDROPPING. YOU CAN TAKE NOTES WITHOUT IT APPEARING OBVIOUS BUT DON'T TRY TO TAPE RECORD THIS TIME.

THEN TRY TO DO SOME INITIAL ANALYSIS, USING THE THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS: LEXIS, GRAMMAR AND WIDER STRUCTURES AND INTERACTIONAL CONVENTIONS AND THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF CONTENT, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY.

UNIT 17 – Belief and Action 1: Discourse and Power

HANDOUT 1

The following is an extract from a doctor's round in which medical students are socialised into being good clinicians. The setting is a neo-natal hospital ward.

- (1) D: and let's gather round . the first of the infants – now what I want you to do is to make a basic . neo-natal examination just as Dr Matthews has to do as soon as a baby arrives in the ward . all right so you are actually going to get your hands on the infant . and look at the key points and demonstrate them to the group as you're doing it will you do that for me please . off you go
- (2) S: well first of all I'm going to ()
- (3) D: first . before you do that is do you wash your hands isn't it I . cos you've just been examining another baby (long silence) are you still in a are you in a position to start examining yet ()
- (4) S: just going to remove this .
- (5) D: very good . it's putting it back that's the problem isn't it eh –
- (6) S: come back Mum –
- (7) D: that's right. OK now just get a little more room by shifting baby . er up the . thing a bit more that's very good . well now . off you go and describe what's going on .
- (8) S: well here's a young baby boy . who we've decided is . thirty. Thirty seven weeks old now . was born . two weeks ago . um is fairly active . his er eyes are open . he's got hair on . his head . his eyes are open
- (9) D: yes
yes you've told me that
- (10) S: um he's crying or making
- (11) D: yeah we we we we've heard that now what other examination are you going to make I mean –
- (12) S: erm we'll see if he'll respond to
- (13) D: now look . did we not look at a baby with a head problem yesterday .
- (14) S: right

(Fairclough, N 1989 *Language and Power*, pp:44)

Based on the same set of criteria as were used in the unit assignment on critical eavesdropping, analyse this extract as follows:

Lexis

What terms are used from a medical perspective? i.e. terms that classify experience in certain ways

What terms are used from a pedagogic perspective?

Are there any words that are used again and again (overwording) ?

What is the relationship between formal and informal words?

Grammar

Who is the active agent in these utterances? Is agency clear?
Are sentences positive or negative? And what effect does this have? (see line 13, for example)
What modes are used? (declarative, imperative etc.)
What pronouns are used, e.g. 'I' versus 'we'?

Wider structures and interactional conventions

How are turns controlled?

Are there interruptions?

How is the whole interaction framed at the beginning?

In what other ways does the doctor control the interaction? e.g. look at the sequence of questions (s)he asks.

Then draw together your analysis in terms of the 3 dimensions used before:

- Content (knowledge and beliefs)
- Social relations
- Social identity

What can you conclude about the way language is used to create and maintain unequal power relations?

UNIT 17 – Belief and Action 2: Discourse and Power

HANDOUT 2 – claptrap

This item is based on Max Atkinson's book *Our Master's Voices* (1984, London: Methuen) and an associated BBC documentary. (See the course video for an extract from the BBC programme and an example of oratory by the former Labour leader, Neil Kinnock).

Introduction

Some of the most powerful people of the 20th century have been brilliant orators, e.g. Kennedy, de Gaulle, Martin Luther King and Churchill. They have been able to influence huge crowds of people, both face to face and on television, through the power of their rhetoric. Studies now show that the ability to influence crowds and in particular get them to applaud is based on a number of rhetorical strategies.

Claptrap

'A device or language designed to catch applause'. (Oxford English Dictionary).

Successful claptrap production 'lies in the simultaneous and co-ordinated use of relatively few verbal and non-verbal techniques which signal to audiences that they should start clapping and when they should do so.' (Atkinson:83-84)

The tricks of oratory

Messages that trigger clapping:

1. favourable responses to persons – 'I'm fortunate in having a marvellous deputy'
2. favourable references to 'us' – 'There is no government anywhere which is tackling the problem with more vigour ...than the Conservatives' (Margaret Thatcher)
3. unfavourable references to 'them' – 'Soviet Marxism is ideologically, politically and morally bankrupt.' (Thatcher)

Rhetorical devices to catch applause:

1. Lists of three – 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (Abraham Lincoln). A common feature of these lists of three is that the message to be applauded is already complete after the first of the list – 'We are a party united in purpose, strategy and resolve' (Thatcher). Both stress, pausing and intonation and non-verbal communication work together to elicit the applause. Look out for this multi-channelled way of communicating. (You might like to watch a political speech in a language you do not understand well and see if you can anticipate when the applause is going to come).

2. Contrastive pairs – ‘I say these people are not being suffocated by care, they are being smothered by neglect.’ (Kinnock). The contrast is communicated through intonation and what is called structural parallelism, i.e. similarities in length, content and grammatical structure between the two pairs. Often the contrastive pair is set up by some kind of puzzle to the audience:

[UK General Election 1979]

Callaghan: ... in this election I don't intend
(0.8)
to make the most promises
(0.8)
I intend that the next Labour government
(0.2)
shall KEEP
(.)
the most promises
Audience: Hear, hear
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

[(0.8 = point eight of a second)
(.) = micro second
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX = applause]