

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There can hardly be a school, hospital, social services department, university or college... that has not in some way become permeated by the language of enterprise.... from the hospital to the railway station, from the classroom to the museum, the nation finds itself translated. 'Patients', 'parents', 'passengers' and 'pupils' are reimagined as 'customers' (du Gay & Salaman, 1992, p. 622)

### 1.1 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

#### 1.11 The commercialisation of education

The phenomenon which both motivated this study and defines its focus is the commercialisation<sup>1</sup> of English language education, a trend which has paralleled the commercialisation of education more generally, which is itself part of a broader process of commercialisation in which products are developed in areas which have not previously been subject to market forces. This process has in turn been linked to the emergence of other forms of social, political and economic change which have been said to characterise contemporary society: notably, "globalisation" (Held & McGrew, 2000), "neoliberalism" (Bourdieu, 1998a); and "consumer culture" (Featherstone, 1991). Together, these changes and their social consequences form the context of the study.

Pressure to commercialise education has been seen in all sectors, in countries including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and Britain (Kenway & Fitzclarence 1998, p. 48; Ball, 1993). Summarising this trend, Cheng (2000) has

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions of 'commercialisation' and 'professional practices' are left open in this chapter. The account of 'commercialisation' is developed as the study progresses, in response to the analyses of the data sets and the social-theoretical resources of the analyst's perspective – explained in Chapter 5. The analyst's perspective. 'Professional practices' are not defined here because they vary between and within institutions, and emerge through the study as a focus of struggle between institutional members. Within the study, these practices are identified through the analysis of data in Chapter 6. The participants' perspective.

observed that

Over the past decade, educational change in most countries has been driven by one imperative: survival in the global economy. This process has been particularly salient in the Asia-Pacific region following the drastic shock of the 1997 economic downturn. But in the current reform process, marked by speeding commercialization and economic preoccupations, other educational missions are being ignored, and countries risk paying a high price for their shortsightedness (para. 1).

Concerns about this process have focused on the potential for conflict between commercial and educational priorities, and on the implications of such conflict for educational quality and social justice outcomes (see, for example, Connell, 1996; Kenway & Bullen, 2001). These concerns have arisen within a political context which Apple has described as “*conservative restoration*” (1996, pp. 23ff), according to which education is valued for its economic utility – reflected in an emphasis on national standards, measurable skills, and training for work. These political developments have in turn shaped and been shaped by trends which have been said to characterise the contemporary world. Foremost among these is ‘globalisation’, seen in growing international flows of trade, capital and people; the reduction of space and time as obstacles to action; and the deepening interconnectedness of cultures, economies and communities (Held & McGrew, op. cit., pp. 3-4). These changes are exemplified by the ways international, commercially-oriented education promotes the transnational movement of students, fees, and educational products and services; and develops new ‘distance’ modes of teaching and learning.

Associated with globalisation has been the emergence in the 1970s of neoliberal economic policies (George, 1999; Quiggin, 1999), based on principles of classical

nineteenth century economic theory (Fusfeld, 1994, pp. 144ff), and associated with notions such as 'global markets', 'free markets' and 'market forces' (see, for example, Hirst & Thompson, 2000, p. 72), and "enterprise culture" (Keat, 1991b, pp. 1ff). In explaining the ubiquity of these changes, Bourdieu (op. cit., p. 95) has observed that neoliberalism, while appearing to be an economic "theory", has become "an immense *political operation*" which orients "the economic choices of those who dominate economic relationships".

At an institutional level, neoliberal policies have resulted in a climate which Kenway, Bigum, Fitzclarence, & Collier (1993, p. 2) have described as "dominated by enthusiasm for growth and for budget cuts", in which "the public sector generally, and the public sector of education in particular, are negatively compared with the private/market sector". The policy which has been most associated with these pressures is 'privatisation', which Giroux (1999, p. 141) has described as "the most powerful educational reform movement". Such policies have created economic and political conditions which have pressured public institutions to commercialise their operations and have promoted the expansion of the private sector's role in delivering educational services.

These changes mark a transformation in the relationship between educational institutions, educational services and students. This is because, in order to compete in the education market, educational services must be constructed and promoted as products in a market increasingly dominated by 'consumer culture', a culture characterised by the promotion of "an extensive range of commodities, goods and experiences" (Featherstone, op. cit., p. 114), based not on their utility but on their capacity to create and enhance the lifestyles of consumers (pp. 83ff). This is a culture characterised by a relationship of "conflict and struggle" (Abercrombie, 1990, pp. 180-1) between producers and "enterprising consumers" (p. 78), in which the absence of utility as the basis for establishing the quality of goods gives rise to a "culture of suspicion" (Sulkunen, 1997, p.

15) between them, and risks of irresolvable “uncertainty and disappointment” (Schulz, 1997, p. 48) for consumers.

Internationally, commercial pressures on public and private institutions have increased as world markets have become more globalised. Driving the international demand for education has been the need for individuals and countries to survive in a world increasingly dominated by OECD countries. In order to compete, less developed countries increasingly need to access the knowledge, skills and language used by the dominant economies (Tollefson, 1991, pp. 80ff). These changes have led to an accelerating demand for education marketed by institutions in the dominant economies and the increasing dominance of and demand for English over other languages, both as a means of communication (Phillipson, 1992, pp. 17ff) and as a commodity (McCallen, 1989a).

These institutional and global changes have contributed to the emergence of what Giddens (1991, pp. 3ff) has called “risk culture”. This is an environment in which people are increasingly subject to changing forms of risk and insecurity, in which their practices are mediated by the needs of institutions, and established forms of knowledge are replaced by knowledge which is continually reevaluated through the “concentrated reflexive monitoring” (ibid., p. 16) of social life. In the workplace, this culture is exemplified by reductions in employment security in the interests of “flexibility” (Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 84) and the need for employees to continually “prove themselves” (p. 100) in economic terms. Such changes place pressure on those with a responsibility to maintain professional standards, such as teachers, to compromise the “integrity” (Keat, 1991a, pp. 222ff) of their practices in order to meet the demands of the market. This pressure on professional practice signals what Sarangi and Roberts (1999b, p. 10) have called “a form of growing deprofessionalisation”, in which “individualised speciality and expertise is undermined”.

### 1.12 The effects on teachers' practices

In education, these pressures on professional practice have led to a situation in which teaching itself is increasingly reformulated to reflect market imperatives (Bernstein, 1996, p. 74; Meadmore, 1999), a process which confronts teachers with the need to meet competing pedagogic and commercial needs. For example, Brookfield (1995) has observed that

Significant learning and critical thinking inevitably induce an ambivalent mix of feelings and emotions, in which anger and confusion are as prominent as pleasure and clarity. The most hallowed rule of business - that the customer is always right - is often pedagogically wrong. Equating good teaching with a widespread feeling among students that you have done what they wanted ignores the dynamics of teaching and prevents significant learning (p. 21).

For teachers, such conflicts exemplify what Fairclough (1992, p. 90) has termed "contradictory interpellation". This is a situation in which participants in social practices are pulled in opposing directions as a result of the competing interests which shape the social practices in which they are engaged.

For example, as Crichton (1994b) has argued, when a student is also a *client* of an educational institution, the "debt of satisfaction" (p. 8) owed by the institution is then paid in part by the student's teacher. This in turn calls for the teacher's role to incorporate that of service-provider in a marketing chain, rendering the teacher, at least in part, accountable to the client for the *product* supplied. This dual role creates "an awkward co-assembly: the teacher/marketer" (ibid., p. 11), who is required to exercise authority over students across a range of interaction types while simultaneously being the agent through whom the debt of satisfaction is to be honoured. As the need to exercise authority over

students rests “uneasily with the show of deference needed to woo clients, the teacher may be left in a precarious position” (ibid.). He or she may feel obliged to exercise authority in meeting students’ pedagogic needs, but be challenged in doing so because of the deference called for by the debt owed by the institution to the student *qua* client.

## **1.2 THE FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

It is the effects of these competing pedagogic and commercial pressures on the professional practices of English language teachers which are the focus of this study. Specifically, the study focuses on the practices of teachers employed in the Australian ELICOS<sup>2</sup> sector. In taking this focus, the study develops and implements a theoretical and methodological framework with which to investigate how teachers’ practices are constructed within the discourses associated with this sector, and how these constructions affect teachers’ ability to meet their expectations of professional practice. The study is ‘preliminary’ in the sense that it focuses on how these pressures are evidenced in teachers’ accounts of their professional practice, and not on examples of these practices themselves, nor on accounts reflecting the perceptions of students, managers or other groups which influence these practices<sup>3</sup>.

### **1.21 The setting**

The ELICOS sector comprises commercially-oriented institutions which provide a range of English language courses to fee-paying students primarily from Asia, and to a lesser extent from Europe and South America. This setting was selected for the study both because of my personal involvement in the sector and because it exemplifies how

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<sup>2</sup> English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students

<sup>3</sup> This point is developed in Chapter 4, Description of the study, and Chapter 9, Conclusions, evaluation and implications.

education operates when it is geared to achieving commercial success in the highly competitive, global market for educational goods and services.

My experience in the sector includes fourteen years in a range of organisations and positions: as a teacher, head teacher, director of studies, researcher, curriculum consultant, member of the editorial board of the sector journal<sup>4</sup> and on the panel of the industry regulatory authority<sup>5</sup>. Outside the sector, I have worked in ELT<sup>6</sup> publishing and English language testing, sectors closely allied with that of ELICOS. It was these experiences, then, which led to my perception that the ELICOS sector's marketing of language acquisition as a product, and its commercial orientation and global operations exemplify how commercialisation works in conjunction with the other social, economic and political trends which characterise the contemporary world.

The history of the sector supports this view. The emergence of the ELICOS industry has paralleled the growth of Australian export education at all levels, and the entry of Australian educational providers into global educational markets exemplifies and reinforces the more general trend towards the globalisation of markets. Over the last twenty years, the perception of Australia as an attractive study destination for international students has been extensively developed by private and public sector organisations through a wide range of strategies, including marketing initiatives, cooperation with other sectors such as government and tourism, and the cultivation of international agent networks and links with overseas institutions and governments.

According to DEST<sup>7</sup> (2002), the growth in the value of Australian export education is likely to continue.

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<sup>4</sup> The EA (English Australia) Journal

<sup>5</sup> National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS)

<sup>6</sup> English Language Teaching

<sup>7</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training



fuelled by increasing incomes in developing countries, an [sic] opening of some new markets (e.g. China), the value placed on an international education and the inability of domestic provision in many countries to grow in pace with demand (Pejovic & Associates 2001:17). The environment is a highly competitive one, with Australia in direct competition with other English speaking first world countries, principally the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand (p. 17).

Within this environment, the ELICOS sector has emerged as a significant player in Australia's export education sector, which, by 2000, was Australia's eighth largest source of export income, generating \$4.2 billion (AV-CC<sup>8</sup>, 2002, p. 13). Since the opening of the first privately owned English language college in Australia in the late 1970s, the number of accredited ELICOS colleges has increased from 86 in 1992 to 136 in 1997, and to 175<sup>9</sup> in 2002 (NEAS, 2003, p. 14). By 2000, the ELICOS sector accounted for 19.5% (AEI<sup>10</sup>, 2002, p. 2) of the 188,277 overseas students studying in Australia, second only to universities (p. 1).

In contributing to the growth of Australian export education, the ELICOS sector draws on, and competes within, the global market in ELT, which is dominated by Britain and the USA, and includes industries which produce teacher training courses, teaching materials, English language examinations and other products (McCallen, 1989a, 1989b).

In terms of the context and focus of the study, then, my knowledge of the ELICOS sector had led me to believe that, as a 'cutting edge' form of international, commercialised education, it would provide ready examples of situations in which commercialisation affects teachers' practices.

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee

<sup>9</sup> These figures do not include 'branches' of colleges, which are separately accredited but tend to reflect the operations of the central college. I have therefore not included them as significant in the study. There were no branches listed in 1992, 27 in 1997, and 19 in 2002 (NEAS, 2003, p. 14).

<sup>10</sup> Australian Education International



## 1.22 The question of tension

Drawing these points together, the research question is *'How does commercialisation affect the professional practices of teachers who work in ELICOS colleges in Australia?'*.

By narrowing the investigation to the relationship between commercialisation and these practices, the question focuses the study on the potential for conflict between commercial and pedagogic interests in the ELICOS sector.

This focus on conflict is consonant with recommendations in social research more generally. For example, Garfinkel (1967, p. 38) asks "what can be done to make trouble" in order to "produce reflections through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected"; and much of Goffman's (for example, 1956, 1959, 1961) work emphasises the value of tension, discrepancy and disruption for social research. For example, he observes that by paying attention to "dissonance, the sociologist can generalise about the ways in which interaction can go awry and, by implication, the conditions necessary for interaction to be right" (1956, p. 265).

From a discourse analytical perspective, the focus also accords with Candlin's (1987, p. 415) proposal that discourse analysis concentrate its research focus on "interactional cruces", and with Fairclough's (op. cit., p. 230) emphasis on "moments of crisis". These are moments in which conflict between or within individuals disrupts normally routine interactions, thereby drawing attention to the social structures and processes which shape these interactions in usually unnoticed ways. Candlin (2001, pp. 3-4) has explained that the value of focusing research on these "moments where in one way or another people's ideologies and beliefs are in some way 'on the line'" is that they offer the potential to "tie discursively evidenced conflict to broader social issues... to provide an explanatory local context for interpreting the broader big 'C' context". Similarly Fairclough (op. cit., p. 230) has argued that, by making visible how interaction is socially situated, conflict can reveal "the actual ways in which people deal with the

problematization of practices” and, in doing so, shed light on the social context beyond the immediate interaction because “any given piece of discourse may simultaneously be a part of a situational struggle, an institutional struggle, and a societal struggle” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 70).

The focus on how commercialisation affects teachers’ practices, then, offers the potential to yield insights into links between the tensions experienced by teachers in maintaining their standards of practice and the broader context of social change outlined above. The challenge for this study is to develop a theoretical framework which acknowledges the complexities of this context, and how the participants, analyst and the study are themselves situated within it. The following section outlines how the theoretical framework and the other components of the study are organised within the thesis.

### **1.3 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

The next chapter, Requirements for the theoretical framework, explains the rationale for taking a discourse analytical approach to investigating the research question. Drawing on Cicourel’s (1982, 1992, 1996) call for “ecological validity” (1982, pp. 1ff) in social and sociolinguistic research, and Candlin’s (1997, p. vix), proposed “multi-perspectived” approach to discourse analysis, the chapter then identifies the challenge for the study as being to integrate the “dimensions” (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992, pp. 6ff) of discourse in a framework which addresses the macro-micro problem, the position of the analyst in relation to the study and to its participants, and the question of how to integrate this framework with an appropriate research methodology.

Chapter 3, The theoretical framework, explains how the framework addresses the requirements established in Chapter 2 by drawing on the account of “interdiscursivity” developed by Fairclough (1992, pp. 124ff), the “multistrategy” approach to social research proposed by Layder (1993, pp. 107ff), Sarangi and Candlin’s (2001, pp. 368ff) notion of

“motivational relevancies”, and Sarangi and Roberts’s (op. cit., p. 43) “practical relevance”. Together, these constructs inform the development of a framework which integrates five ‘perspectives’: that of the analyst, the participants, the social resource, the social practice, and the social/institution. To provide options with which to operationalise these perspectives, they are linked to traditions in linguistics and sociology, linkages which enable the identification of the key social themes which shape the study.

To enable the application of this framework in research, it is then linked to Miles and Huberman’s (1994) “interactive” (pp. 12ff) model of data analysis and the analytical procedures they recommend (pp. 55ff), procedures which draw on Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) “grounded theory”. The resulting theoretical framework seeks to provide a reflexive and iterative model in which the components of the research process inform each other, and are continually refined in response to emergent findings.

Chapter 4, Description of the study, sets out the rationale for the design of the study and explains how it operationalises the theoretical framework by drawing on Mouzelis’s (1995, pp. 15-16) distinction between “micro” and “macro” actors to identify data sets with which to operationalise the three perspectives<sup>11</sup>.

The participants’ perspective is operationalised in terms of a thematic analysis of critical incident diaries kept by a sample of ELICOS teachers<sup>12</sup>. The analysis focuses on identifying the ways in which the diarists perceive teachers’ ability to conduct their professional practices to be compromised. The social resource perspective draws on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985) to investigate how participants and relationships are constructed in a sample of promotional brochures<sup>13</sup> produced by ELICOS colleges. The findings of these two analyses are then drawn together to investigate whether, as predicted by Fairclough’s (op. cit., p. 207ff) account of the “colonization” of

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<sup>11</sup> As explained above, the social practice perspective is not operationalised because this would have exceeded the scope of the current study by including data reflecting examples of teachers’ practices.

<sup>12</sup> Appendices 1-3

discourse, the discourse instantiated in the brochures would also be found to shape teachers' practices. These findings are in turn combined with the analyses of the three data sets which operationalise the social/institutional perspective: the News-letter of the sector's peak body<sup>14</sup>, the regulations of the industry regulatory authority<sup>15</sup>, and training materials from the most popular teaching training course. These analyses seek evidence of how the macro actors which produce and are represented in these texts shape ELICOS teachers' practices. In doing so, the analyses investigate links between the findings of the diary and brochure analyses, and the key social themes identified in Chapter 3.

The next four chapters report on the operationalisation of the perspectives and the analyses of the data sets which represent them.

Chapter 5, The analyst's perspective, draws on the notions of "motivational relevancies" (Sarangi & Candlin, loc. cit.) and "practical relevance" (Sarangi & Roberts, loc. cit.) to situate my resources as the analyst in a reflexive relationship to those of the participants, to the study itself, and to the social-theoretical explanation of commercialisation which is developed throughout the study. Consistent with the theoretical framework, this explanation informed and was informed by the findings which emerged as the study progressed. By the end of the study, the explanation draws in particular on Fairclough's (1996, pp. 1ff) account of the "technologization of discourse", Sarangi and Roberts's op. cit., pp.13ff) account of "institutional" and "professional" discourse, Bourdieu's (1991: Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) 'theory of practice', his critique of neoliberalism (1998a), and Gramsci's (1975/1988a, 1975/1988b; Boggs, 1976) theory of 'hegemony'.

Chapter 6, The participants' perspective, reports on the analysis of the critical incident diaries, in which an account is developed of how the diarists perceive teachers'

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<sup>13</sup> Appendices 4-6

<sup>14</sup> Appendix 7

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 8

practices to be compromised. The analysis focuses on which social actors are involved and how they are reported to influence teachers and their practices. The findings evidence that teachers' practices are shaped by a three-way struggle between managers, teachers and students over the control and definition of 'teachers' practices' themselves. These findings in turn support the inclusion of Fairclough's accounts of "technologization" (loc. cit.) and "contradictory interpellation" (1992, p. 90), Bourdieu's (1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, op. cit.) 'theory of practice', and Gramsci's (op. cit.) theory of 'hegemony' within the social-theoretical account of commercialisation.

Chapter 7, The social resource perspective, compares the findings of the diary analysis with the systemic functional analysis of the construction of participants and relationships in the brochures to seek evidence of interdiscursive relations between them. This comparison yields a pattern of correlations between the two sets of findings which, it is argued, reveals the operation of the 'discourse of commercialisation'. As the dominant discourse within the colleges, this constructs managers, and students as 'meso' actors and teachers as 'micro' actors within a 'community of consumption' in which teaching and learning are constructed as a 'consumption process'. These conclusions support and are supported by the extension of the social-theoretical account of commercialisation to include Sarangi and Roberts's (loc. cit.) account of "institutional" and "professional" discourse, Fairclough's (op. cit., p. 207ff) account of the "colonization" of discourse and Bourdieu's (1991, pp. 51ff) notions of "legitimacy" and "symbolic violence".

Chapter 8, The social/institutional perspective, reports on the analyses of the News-letter of the sector's peak body, regulations of the industry regulatory authority, and teacher training materials. The analyses investigate how the 'macro' actors who produce and are constructed in these texts influence the 'micro' and 'meso' identities and relationships advanced by the discourse of commercialisation. Based on the findings of these analyses, and explained by the social-theoretical account of commercialisation, these

constructions are, it is argued, themselves advanced by the operations of macro actors and legitimised by “neoliberal discourse” (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 95). The findings support and are supported by the inclusion within the social-theoretical account of commercialisation of Bourdieu’s critique of neoliberalism (ibid.) and his analysis of consumption (1984).

Chapter 9, Conclusions, evaluation and implications, draws together the findings of the study and evaluates its effectiveness in addressing the research question, given its aim of developing and implementing a theoretical framework which addresses Cicourel’s (loc. cit.) call for “ecological validity”. The evaluation draws on Miles and Huberman’s (1994, p. 277ff) account of “goodness” in social research, and, consistent with the requirements of the theoretical framework, does not measure the study against this account, but explains the evaluation criteria as themselves part of the analyst’s resources and therefore in a reflexive relationship to the study and to the participants. Drawing on this relationship, the chapter involves a dialogue between the study and the evaluation criteria, a dialogue which forms the basis for a mutual critique. Within this critique, the implications of the study are included within its evaluation.

## CHAPTER 2: REQUIREMENTS FOR THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is good medicine, we think, for researchers to make their preferences clear. To know how a researcher construes the shape of the social world and aims to give us a credible account of it is to know our conversational partner (Miles & Huberman, op. cit., p. 4).

The problem faced by sociolinguistics is not confined to making itself accountable to linguistics, but also to social science and natural science. This implies taking a stance about its methods of activity (Sarangi & Candlin, op. cit., p. 354).

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the rationale for employing discourse analysis to address the research question is explained, and the requirements which the theoretical framework needs to address are identified. These are derived from the ontological and methodological implications of Cicourel's (loc. cit.) notion of "ecological validity" in discourse analysis. The ontological implications highlight the need to integrate but not *a priori* subordinate or exclude either macro or micro aspects of social life; and to acknowledge within the framework that discourse analysis is itself socially situated, just as the phenomena it seeks to investigate. Consistent with these implication, it is argued that methodology should acknowledge that discourse analysts and their data are themselves socially situated; and should enable the analysis of discourse to be grounded in data representing both macro and micro aspects of social life. From these implications, five requirements are developed which need to be addressed by the theoretical framework.



## 2.2 THE NEED FOR A DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

While discourse analysis offers advantages for this study, at the same time it raises challenges – not the least of which how to define ‘discourse analysis’ for the purposes of the study. This section explains the potential discourse analysis offers the study, and the challenges it poses for the theoretical framework.

The value of using discourse analysis to investigate the research question is that recent developments in this field offer the potential to link the social and linguistic processes in which commercial and pedagogic interests are played out in teachers’ practices to the macro conditions in which they arise. It will be evident from the description of the setting of the study that the investigation of ELICOS teachers’ practices is suited to this approach, their being simultaneously situated within the local context of face-to-face interaction, the institutional context of ELICOS colleges, and the broader context of global social and economic change. Both micro and macro contexts are therefore potentially relevant to explaining how commercialisation affects teachers’ practices.

Developments in discourse analysis which have highlighted the value of integrating micro and macro contexts have focused on explaining how people manage their institutional roles and how these roles are shaped within the broader social context. The move to investigate social life in this way has been led by discourse analysts who have emphasised discourse as a form of *social practice* (for example, Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Candlin, 1987). As Candlin (1997, p. x) has explained, this account of discourse analysis extends its definition beyond the study of “stretches of connected spoken or written language”, or of “language in use, as a process which is socially situated.... to stress the constructive and dynamic role of either spoken or written discourse in structuring areas of knowledge and the social and institutional practices which are associated with them”.

According to this “constructive and dynamic” account, discourse includes a social dimension to which it stands in a *reflexive* relationship, in which “discourse is a means of talking and writing about and acting upon worlds, a means which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices within these worlds” (ibid.). Discourse in this sense, then, can be used to *explain* social interaction, in contexts as diverse as “the family, the workplace, the school, the community centre, the local offices of government, the hospital or the clinic, the institutions of commerce and employment” (Candlin, 1996, p. xiii). ‘Explanation’ here includes any aspect of the context which shapes and is potentially shaped by the social interaction under scrutiny. These aspects of context include the immediate context of the interaction as well as relevant institutional, and broader social, economic and historical structures and processes.

Employed in this broad sense, discourse analysis is being increasingly used to investigate areas of professional life, such as in legal, medical, mediation and counselling settings (for some recent examples, see Sarangi & Roberts, 1999a; Gunnarsson, Linell & Nordberg, 1997; Mumby & Clair, 1997). These applications support Jaworski and Coupland’s (1999, p. 3) observation that discourse is “an inescapably important concept for understanding society and human responses to it, as well as for understanding language itself”.

However, the problem for the researcher wanting to use discourse analysis is that, within this focus on professional life, there are still differing accounts of what discourse is, differences which add to what is already a diverse range of views on what constitutes discourse and how best to investigate it. Coupland, Sarangi and Candlin (2001, p. xiv) have called this the “radical heterogeneity” of discourse analysis; van Dijk (1995, p. 459) has described it as “the creative chaos of an exciting new discipline”; and Schiffrin (1994, p. 5) has written that discourse analysis “is widely regarded as one of the most vast, but also one of the least defined, areas in linguistics”. The difficulty of defining ‘discourse

analysis' has been compounded by the interdisciplinary origins of the term 'discourse'. As Fairclough (1992, p. 3) notes, "Discourse is a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints".

The differences between approaches to discourse analysis arise from a lack of consensus on the answers to certain ontological and methodological questions<sup>16</sup>. The ontological questions concern how to explain what 'discourse' is. These include the questions of how to connect language and context (Duranti & Goodwin, *op. cit.*), and how social theory can be acknowledged within discourse analysis, a question which draws in the question of how to account for both micro and macro social phenomena within discourse analysis (Coupland, *op. cit.*).

The methodological questions concern how to investigate discourse. They include the question of how to acknowledge within research the differing perspectives of the analyst and the research participants (Sarangi & Candlin, *op. cit.*, p. 379), and how to delimit contextual inclusions in the analysis of discourse. This might be called the 'When is enough enough?' problem (Silverstein, 1992, cited in Sarangi & Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

A third type of question arises from a tendency to under-emphasise the relationship between ontology and methodology. Commenting on this tendency, Jaworski and Coupland (*op. cit.*, p. 37) have observed that, "there are some basic issues of research methods and interpretation which do not and should not get overlooked in the rush to discourse". Questions to be addressed here include how prior social theory is to guide research while allowing the generation of new theory (Layder, *op. cit.*, pp. 2ff), and how social-theoretical constructs are to be operationalised (Meyer, 2001, p. 18). The answers to these questions are in turn dependent on the relationship between the context studied and

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<sup>16</sup> My use of 'ontology' and 'methodology' adapts Guba's (1990, p. 18) use of these terms to identify different research paradigms.

the context of the study: in other words, on the question of the extent to which the analyst's investigation of social phenomena is itself situated within the context of the phenomena it seeks to explain (Sarangi & Candlin, op. cit., pp. 351ff).

These questions pose a challenge for the current study; and I am reluctant to assume in advance a particular answer to the question "What is *it* that's going on here?" (Goffman, 1974, p. 9). My response to dealing with these questions has therefore been to develop the outline of a theoretical framework which seeks both to acknowledge the macro and micro complexity of discourse and the situatedness of discourse analysis, and to provide a methodology for investigating the research question in a principled way. To reflect this aim, the framework integrates an account of discourse, called the 'ontology', with a methodology with which to investigate it. The framework takes as its starting point Cicourel's (loc. cit.) notion of "ecological validity", which is explained in the next section.

### **2.3 CICOUREL'S CHALLENGE**

In his recent work, Cicourel (1982, 1992, 1996) has posed a challenge which has implications for the nature of and relationships between ontology and methodology.

Cicourel (1982, pp. 12ff) contrasted the term "quality control" with what he called "ecological validity" in social research. The former refers to ways of safeguarding reliability and validity in methods of data collection and analysis. He used "ecological validity" to focus on the usually unacknowledged ways in which research processes are shaped by the tacit knowledge of researchers and participants. Again in 1996, he defined it as referring to whether methods of data gathering and analysis are "commensurate with routine problem solving and language use in natural settings" (p. 221). In both papers, he emphasised that researchers', participants', and readers' tacit knowledge necessarily shapes how they understand the relevance and coherence of data collection, analysis and findings. This knowledge typically includes "extensive folk theories or cultural mental

models about objects, events, language, causality, rules or regularities, beliefs, other creatures and interpersonal relationships” (ibid., p. 222).

Cicourel (1992) developed the notion of “interpenetrating contexts” (p. 309) to explain how this knowledge shapes peoples’ understandings both of the context studied and the context of the study itself. He argued that tacit knowledge and the decisions it informs in one context are developed in and shaped by other contexts. He emphasised that ‘context’ in this sense is multiple, made up of “local and more abstract senses of culture or social organization” involving “multiple ethnographic and/or organisation settings and informants” (ibid., p. 305). These types and layers of context may be interrelated in numerous ways: they ‘interpenetrate’ each other, because “all social interaction and/or speech events presuppose and are informed by analogous prior forms of socially organized experiences” (ibid., p. 308). This includes the practices associated with discourse analysis, which are themselves situated within these interpenetrating contexts.

He makes clear that the discourse analyst is *accountable* for recognising and reflecting in methodology this interpenetration of contexts, being “obligated to justify what has been included and what has been excluded according to stated theoretical goals, methodological strategies employed, and the consistency and convincingness of an argument or analysis” (ibid., p. 309).

It is clear here that in being accountable for acknowledging the *ecology* of the study the researcher is also responsible for its methodological *quality*. In identifying methodology as a main concern for Cicourel, Duranti and Goodwin (op. cit.) describe his “ideal researcher in an ideal model of discourse analysis” as someone

who does not hide his or her sources of information and research choices but makes them into a common resource to be shared with the readers in an attempt

to unveil the hidden processes of the selection of information which guides participants and analysts alike in the course of their daily lives (p. 292)

It was the challenge of developing a theoretical framework with which to investigate this interpenetrated world in an accountable way, captured in Cicourel's (op. cit.) comment below, which served as a stimulus to the current study.

Language and other practices are interdependent. Knowing something about the ethnographic setting, the perception of and characteristics attributed to others, and broader and local social organisational conditions becomes imperative for an understanding of linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of communicative events (p. 294).

This implies an ontology of discourse which includes the linguistic, the socially situated, the local and broader contexts, the perspectives of researchers and participants, and the situatedness of discourse analysis itself. The associated challenge is to devise a research methodology which is both practically feasible and which does justice to the complexity of the ontology on which the analysis rests.

The force of Cicourel's challenge, and its implications for ontology and methodology have been clearly identified by Candlin (1997), who has observed that

What emerges is a requirement for a parallel and complex interdiscursivity of analysis, matching the interplay between the macro and the micro, the actual and the historical, the ethnographic and the ethnomethodological, the interactively sociolinguistic and the discoursal and above all acknowledging the need to offer explanations of why rather than merely descriptions of how. The issue then

immediately arises of how to capture these distinct methodological discourses in a workable program of research, not merely harmonising the different discourses but actively making use of their distinct epistemologies and modes of practice to enrich and expand a grounded analysis (p. xii).

The operationalisation of this “multi-perspectived” (ibid., p. xiv) approach to discourse analysis, Candlin (p. xiii) argues, calls for a “reflexive methodology”, in which the research process involves the “triangulation of the analysed data with the participating sources of that data” requiring that a “research alliance be forged between the analyst and the ‘professional’”.

While I have previously outlined the beginnings of such an approach (Crichton, 1996), the theoretical framework developed for this study can be seen as the ‘working out’ of such a multi-perspectived framework. While the methodological issues faced by such a framework are also encountered in part at least by other branches of qualitative social research, Hammersley’s (1992) observation on critical ethnography might equally describe the research envisaged here. He writes that the theoretical underpinnings of such research constitute

a daunting list of components, in comparison with more conventional versions of social theory; and meeting its requirements would raise most of the methodological problems that face conventional social research simultaneously (p. 117).



## **2.4 THE IMPLICATIONS OF CICOUREL'S CHALLENGE**

### **2.41 Ontological differences: language, context and social theory**

#### 2.411 Language and context

Meeting Cicourel's challenge raises the problem of how to link the analyses of language and context, described by Brown and Yule (1983, p. 50) as a problem of the "expanding context". The problem arises because once context is acknowledged to inform the production and interpretation of features of language

A problem for the discourse analyst must be, then to decide when a particular feature is relevant to the specification of a particular context and what degree of specification is required. Are there general principles which will determine the relevance or nature of the specification, or does the analyst have to make ad hoc judgements on these questions each time he attempts to work on a fragment of discourse? (ibid.)

The dilemma here is that in order to investigate how language is used and understood, the researcher needs a principled way of identifying the relevant aspects of context, which is potentially vast and undifferentiated – a "lumpen mass" (ibid.). On the other hand, there is a long history in linguistics of analysing the detailed features of language. The challenge is to integrate language and context in a way which allows the detailed analysis of language in relation to relevant features of context. The danger, as Brown and Yule imply, is that once context is included in the analysis of language, the analysis will become unaccountable.

Duranti and Goodwin (op. cit., p. 3) use the notions of "figure" and "ground" to explain why context has been a persistent problem in discourse analysis. By "figure" they mean whatever phenomenon is chosen as the centre of attention; the "ground" is what is

left over. Their point is that the very act of attending to one phenomenon marginalises others, making them seem, in Brown and Yule's (loc. cit.) phrase, a "lumpen mass". Duranti and Goodwin (ibid., p. 4) argue that historically this has been the relationship between language and context in discourse analysis: language has been treated as the figure or "focal event" and context has thereby been cast as the "background" to language (pp. 10ff). This has made context seem "far more amorphous, problematic, and less stable" than "well outlined, sharply defined, and well articulated" sentences (ibid.12-14). The danger is that these perceived differences between language and context will lead the analyst to under-emphasise or exclude context from the analysis, thereby creating the sentence as a "self- sufficient, self-contained world" (ibid., p. 12). The problem is that this is not the world in which language is interpreted and produced; in other words, life does not happen between full stops. Duranti and Goodwin's discussion of the relationship between language and context, then, highlights the need to keep both 'in play' during analysis and to ensure that neither are marginalised in explaining the language/context nexus. These are issues which are developed further in relation to the macro-micro problem, below.

The challenge, then, is to attend to both language and context, not keeping the analytical focus static but moving the focal event like a lens over both<sup>17</sup>. This raises the question of where to focus the analysis and what is to count *as* context in the language/context nexus (ibid., p. 13). Without *some* answer to this question, the analyst is left with nowhere to start the analysis, unless this be in the "ad hoc" way prefigured by Brown and Yule (loc. cit.). Duranti and Goodwin (op. cit., p. 4) argue that the answer should start with participants' perceptions, and that any such investigations

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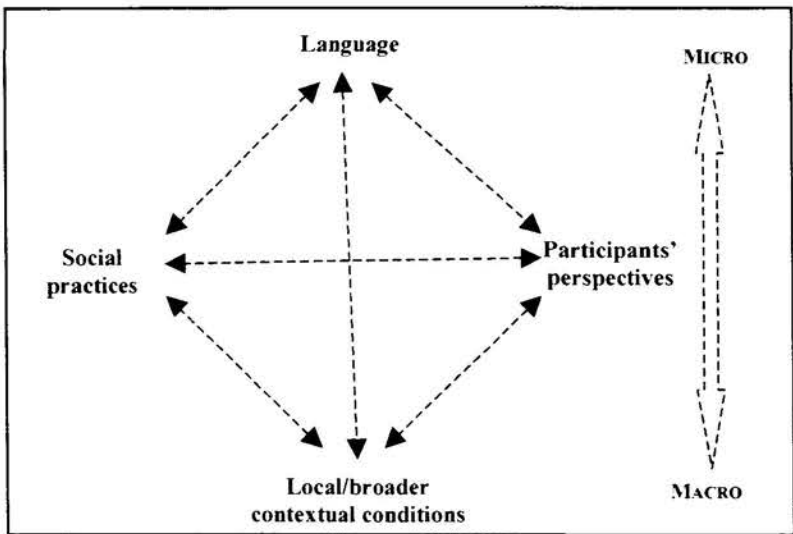
<sup>17</sup> This is an adaptation of Duranti and Goodwin's (1992, p. 13) use of the metaphor "searchlight" to describe the "focal event". The use here of 'lens', while it does not change the value of the metaphor, foreshadows the use of Venn diagrams in the theoretical framework, explained in the Chapter 3. The theoretical framework.

will be influenced both by what is relevant to the particular focal event, and by the interests of the analyst, and include certain “dimensions” or “basic parameters” of context (p. 6).

The questions raised by participants’ perceptions, relevance, the role of the analyst’s perspective and the basic parameters of context are central to researching language and context, and therefore need to be addressed in meeting Cicourel’s challenge. These questions are addressed in this and the following chapter. As a starting point for developing the theoretical framework, I have adapted Duranti and Goodwin’s (ibid.) notion of “dimensions”. The spatial metaphor implicit in this term emphasises that the language/context nexus is made up of *relationships* between certain phenomena. The term is, therefore, used here to describe the nexus between language, social practices, the perceptions of participants, and the “broader and local organisational conditions” (Cicourel, op. cit., p. 294) which Cicourel’s challenge requires.

Figure 1, below, displays these ‘dimensions of discourse’ and provides a starting point for operationalising the complex construct needed to meet Cicourel’s requirements.

Figure 1: Dimensions of discourse



There are four dimensions: language, social practices, participants' perspectives and the local and broader contextual conditions. The arrows indicate potential relationships between them. The challenge, as explained by Duranti and Goodwin, and raised here by Cicourel, is how to explain the relationships in a way which integrates the dimensions in discourse analysis.

Figure 1 represents what Sarangi and Coulthard (2000, p. xv) have described as a "complex web of similarities" between different approaches to discourse analysis. Extending this metaphor a little, it implies that, in adopting a particular approach to discourse analysis, researchers inevitably locate themselves on this "web". They thereby reflect and advance a particular view of the relationships between language, social practice, participant perspectives, and the local and broader contextual conditions. However, any attempt to explain these relationships embroils discourse analysis in the macro-micro problem, the focus of the next section.

#### 2.412 The macro-micro problem in discourse analysis

Coupland (op. cit.) makes clear that the problem of integrating language and context inevitably links discourse analysis to social theory. Once this link is made, the language/context nexus becomes caught up in the macro-micro problem, which numerous commentators have described as the central problem in social theory (Dawe, 1971; Alexander & Giesen, 1987, p. 1; Mouzelis, op. cit., p. 26; DiMaggio, 1991, p. 76; Sarangi, 2001, p. 34). The influence of the macro-micro problem is shown in Figure 1 to range from, at the micro end, the minutiae of choices made within the linguistic system, through participant perspectives and socially-situated practices, out into the wider reaches of macro social/institutional structures and processes. The key point here is that discourse analysis, whether tacitly or explicitly, by inclusion or omission, inescapably takes a stance on the relationship between macro and micro phenomena. This reflects Coupland's (op.

cit., p. 8) observation that "social theory is not optional in sociolinguistics, in the sense that any research design and any interpretation of data must make assumptions about social organisation and/or social processes".

In addition to these ontological 'terms of engagement', the researcher's approach to investigating discourse will reveal a particular methodological stance. This section focuses on the ontological aspect of Figure 1. The relationship between ontology, methodological and the researcher's perspective is examined below.

According to Dawe (1971, pp. 543ff), underlying the macro-micro problem is the question of how to solve the "problem of order", the problem of explaining why society is overwhelmingly orderly. In sociology, there have been broadly two responses to this question. One has emphasised macro phenomena, maintaining that order arises because individuals are *constrained* to act in orderly ways by stable social structures and systems. Dawe argues that this response has dominated social theory, and given rise to numerous variations - in all of which "the actor is still on the receiving end of the system" (ibid., p. 544). These variations have led in two directions: to cast the individual as *regulated* by the social system, or as *constituted* by it. Examples of this tendency to view "action as derivative of system" (ibid., p. 551) include the work of Parsons and Marx (Coupland, op. cit., p. 9).

These macro-oriented views are opposed to the parallel movement in sociology, which reverses the explanation of social order, maintaining that stable social structures and systems result from the *concerted actions* of individuals. Like the macro response, the micro social response has emerged in numerous forms. Examples include what Coupland terms "rational action and praxis perspectives" (ibid., p. 10). The former assumes that social action results from strategic decision making, and includes symbolic interactionism; the latter views social action as less predictable and more "emergent" (ibid., p. 11), and includes ethnomethodology. From these *micro social* perspectives, "social order is not that

which holds society together by somehow controlling individual wills, but that which comes about in the mundane but relentless transactions of these wills" (Knorr-Cetina, 1981, p. 7).

Dawe (op. cit., p 550) calls the macro response the "social system" explanation of the macro-micro problem and the micro response the "social action" explanation. He argues that these two positions are in conflict "at every level" (ibid., p. 551), and that sociology itself has developed in response to this conflict. He further argues that these views are unsatisfactory because each fails to account for both macro and micro social phenomena by excluding one or the other (ibid., p. 548ff)<sup>18</sup>.

On the other hand, attempts to synthesise these positions will, he maintains, inevitably subordinate or reduce social action to the system or the social system to social action. In his view, the underlying problem is that macro and micro responses, and attempts at synthesising them, are typically geared to solving the problem of order by locating the source of social control: what he calls "*the problem of control*" (ibid., p. 548). He argues that casting the problem of order in terms of control has polarised social-theoretical accounts of the macro and micro relationship because one or the other can be the source of social control but not both. He suggests that this problem is embedded in the history and language of the macro-micro debate, and that the way out of the impasse is to recognise that there may be multiple ways in which social order can arise, not just as the result of a controlling relationship between macro and micro phenomena. I interpret the force of this point as being that the macro-micro problem will dominate social theory as long as the role and location of social control is treated primarily as an ontological issue. If the question becomes the subject of investigation rather than its premise, the way might be

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<sup>18</sup> There is a resemblance between this and the "social realist" (Carter & Sealey, 2000, pp. 11ff) argument that macro and micro phenomena cannot be "conflated" because each is needed to explain the other. Carter and Sealey (ibid.) put forward this argument in proposing their model of the relationship between macro and micro phenomena, a model discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the theoretical framework developed for the current study.

open to *discover* how social order arises in different settings.<sup>19</sup> This is very much the line taken by Layder (op. cit.), on whom I draw in the development of the theoretical framework in the next chapter.

Coupland (op. cit., p. 8) calls the three responses to the macro-micro problem – social structure (system), social action and integration (synthesis) - “orientations to social theory”, and argues that these orientations, while not necessarily stated, have been evident through the history of discourse analysis as well as that of social theory.

From a discourse analytical perspective, Coupland (ibid., p. 19) upholds the need for analysis and social theory to inform each other, and argues against analysis which is either driven by or ignores social theory. The challenge here is how to combine the analysis of data representing all the dimensions of discourse with the advantages offered by linking sociolinguistics to social theory. This is the “paradox” which Coupland et al. (2001, p. xv) identify and which the theoretical framework for the current study needs to address. On the one hand, a strength of sociolinguistics is its close attention to situated data. On the other hand, to ignore social theory is likely to weaken the design and explanatory power of discourse analysis. The danger for discourse analysis is that the social orientation will undermine the focus on situated data by determining in advance how discourse operates in particular settings.

A metaphor to describe how the three orientations to social theory are revealed in discourse analysis might be that of a ‘hierarchic mechanism’. Within this metaphor, the dimensions of discourse intermesh rather like driver and slave cogs in a gearbox. Depending on the orientation, one dimension may drive the others, and one or more may be partially or fully disengaged from the system. The point is that within this metaphor at

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<sup>19</sup> Such an approach would, for example, leave open for investigation the ways in which “language is used for the living of life, how it acts in the creation, maintenance, and alteration of human relations, which range from consensus to conflict, from cooperation to exploitation, and from accommodation to submission” (Hasan, 1993, p. 79, cited in Coupland, 2001, p. 19).



least one dimension drives the relationships between the dimensions but not all can. The risk is that some dimensions will be *a priori* subordinated, underdeveloped or excluded. In the next section, Fairclough's (op. cit.) ontology for critical discourse analysis is used to illustrate the challenge of integrating the dimensions of discourse, and of accounting for the relationship between these and research methodology. Drawing on this example, and its significance for social research more generally, the main ontological and methodological requirements of the theoretical framework are then identified.

#### 2.413 The macro-micro problem in critical discourse analysis

Fairclough's (ibid.) framework for critical discourse analysis (CDA) is arguably the most comprehensive and influential attempt to integrate the dimensions of discourse. His ontology is explained in more detail below, in Chapter 3. The focus here is on how it explains the relationship between the dimensions of discourse in the account of macro and micro phenomena.

While the "literature on CDA... is vast" (Wodak, 2001, p. 13), the common 'critical' interest means that such research is, in Giddens's (1993, p. 67) words, "tied to an 'emancipatory interest'... by seeking to free individuals from domination: not only from the domination by others, but from their domination by forces which they do not understand or control (including forces that are in fact themselves humanly created)". The critical agenda therefore "implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change" (Fairclough, op. cit., p. 9).

In terms of the relationship between language and context, Fairclough's ontology incorporates this explanatory and emancipatory agenda by linking macro and micro phenomena through the operations of power and ideology. In doing so it emphasises how socially-situated language shapes participants' identities and relationships, and connects

these socially-constructive features of language to the fact that much of what goes on in social interaction is unnoticed by participants. In its emancipatory capacity, the ontology is designed to allow the investigation of how this pervasive but overwhelmingly unnoticed role of language in constructing identities and relationships advances the interests of particular social groups and marginalising those of others. To enable this investigation, the ontology draws together insights from linguistics and macro and micro social theory in what Fairclough (ibid. pp. 62ff) has termed a “social theory of discourse”. This is

an attempt to bring together three analytical traditions, each of which is indispensable for discourse analysis. These are the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociological tradition of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures (ibid., p. 72).

Drawing on these “three traditions”, the ontology explains how social processes shape people’s identities and relationships within “discursive practices” (ibid., pp. 72ff), the term he develops to describe the combination of text and social practice. Within this account, the ontology focuses particularly on how the power and ideologies of dominant social groups shape discursive practices to create and perpetuate social inequalities. Macro-level power and ideology are thus given a dominant role in determining language use, and thereby the construction of peoples’ identities and relationships.

In evaluating this ontology, a number of commentators have pointed out that Fairclough is himself a victim of the macro-micro problem because his treatment of the relationship between macro and micro phenomena leaves little or no room for the

perspectives of individual social actors (see, for example, Malcolm, 1994, p. 88; Hammersley, 1997, p. 245). This is because his ontology casts their actions as determined by relations of power and ideology between social groups. As a result, individuals cannot shape discursive practices without being determined to do so by them.

It is true that Fairclough (op. cit., p. 91) emphasises that this ontology allows individuals to be creative in interpreting and managing their parts in discursive events, arguing that this creative potential arises because the relationship between text and social practice is mediated by "processes of production and interpretation" (p. 80). This mediation between text and social practice involves a "dialectic" (ibid., p. 65) relationship between the individual's creation of discourse and the constraining influence of social structure. Furthermore, he (ibid., pp. 89-91) maintains that social participants can be immune to the subordinating effects of ideology, and that not all discourse is ideologically invested to the same extent.

However, within the ontology as a whole, macro-level power and ideology remain dominant in determining how discursive practices shape individuals, what "members' resources" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24, 1992, p. 72) are available to participants, and therefore how individuals produce and interpret discourse. It is therefore still hard to see how there could be space for participants' perspectives within the ontology, in which social actors are left with little to do but conform to discursive practices.

This, then, is an instance of how the 'macro-micro problem' is revealed in the relationships between the dimensions of discourse, in which the influence of macro on micro is explained but leaves the micro without space to influence the macro. The problem results from the Marxist legacy of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 260). As Layder (1994, p. 52) observes, "it must not simply be assumed that single sources of domination (like that of class) will have some overall and deterministic influence on society". The problem surfaces for Fairclough in the way individual action is

subordinated to macro social structures and processes. One consequence is that there is little room in his ontology for an account of language and context which includes participants' perspectives.

This ontological problem of incorporating macro and micro phenomena also has implications for the operationalisation of Fairclough's ontology in research<sup>20</sup>, implications which raise the more general question of the relationship between ontology and methodology. Thus, in terms of research methodologically, the social-theoretical insights which underpin constructs such as 'power' and 'ideology' also inform the analysis of data representing micro social phenomena. This use of prior theory to guide analysis places critical discourse analysis in opposition to approaches to discourse which seek to separate data analysis from the analyst's perspective on social-theoretical questions. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, p. 7) identify the "most influential" of these as conversational analysis, drawing on Schegloff (1997) as an example of criticism of critical discourse analysis. Schegloff (*ibid.*), reflecting the micro social orientation of conversational analysis, has argued that, in critical discourse analysis, the analyst's ontological assumptions drive the research process, in which

Discourse is too often made subservient to contexts not of its participants' making, but of its analyst's insistence. Relevance flies in all directions; the text's centre cannot hold in the face of the diverse theoretical prisms through which it is refracted (p. 183).

Similarly, Widdowson (1995, 1998, 2000) has claimed that the critical discourse analysis of texts is driven by macro social assumptions, not grounded in linguistic theory or data.

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<sup>20</sup> The relationship Fairclough (1989, p. 26, 1992, p. 231) proposes between ontology and methodology, in which description, interpretation and explanation are aligned with text, discursive practice and social practice is a focus of Chapter 3. The theoretical framework.

and that these assumptions are not themselves critiqued. Central to the force of his argument is the claim that this leads critical discourse analysis to conduct “interpretation” rather than “analysis” (1998, p. 148). In response to Schegloff and, by implication, Widdowson, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (*loc. cit.*) have questioned the assumption, underlying these criticisms, that analysis “which excludes theoretical preoccupations of the analyst is possible”, arguing that “all forms of analysis are theoretically informed”.

In terms of this study, the important point here is that these criticisms of Fairclough’s framework and his response highlight concerns about the nature of and relationship between ontological assumptions and methodology in critical discourse analysis and social research more generally.

Thus, it is these concerns which have recently been the focus of moves to review and clarify the ontological and methodological bases of critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, *ibid.*, p. 1; Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 17ff; Wodak, *op. cit.*, p. 12). These moves are part of a “general debate about the whole enterprise of CDA” (Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 17), central to which are the questions of “to which theories... the different methods refer” and of how to “operationalise theoretical concepts” in order to “translate... theoretical claims into instruments and methods of analysis” (p. 18).

In social research more generally, these concerns about the relationship between ontology and methodology hinge on the question of whether it is “possible to perform any research free of a priori judgements and... to gain insight from purely empirical data without using any preframed categories of experience” (*ibid.*, p. 17). Layder (1993, pp. 2ff), from a social research perspective, has identified this concern as a tension between the need to draw on prior theory in guiding research and to develop new theory which may conflict with prior theory. Two dangers are posed by this tension. On the one hand, if prior theory dominates the research, there is the danger “knowledge cannot progress since the data of research is always interpreted as reinforcing or verifying the existing perspective

of the researcher" (ibid., p. 53). On the other hand, without this perspective, there is no starting point for research because, as Cicourel (op. cit.) emphasises, this is inevitably informed by the explicit or tacit assumptions and decisions of the researcher.

It is the implications of these ontological and methodological questions, highlighted by Fairclough's framework, for the theoretical framework developed here which are the focus of the remaining sections of this chapter.

## **2.42 Implications for the ontology**

In relation to the ontology, Fairclough's framework highlights the problem of how to integrate the dimensions of discourse within an account of the macro-micro relationship which does not subordinate, underdevelop or exclude any of the dimensions. As Cicourel (1981, p. 56) observes, "the challenge is to sustain one level while demonstrating that the other is an integral part of the discussion of the findings and the theoretical propositions advanced". This implies a framework which does not assume in advance particular relationships between the dimensions, but which can be guided by and linked to social theory in accordance with the analyst's prior knowledge and emergent understanding of the social setting under scrutiny.

Rather than an 'interlocking mechanism', then, this suggests a 'hydraulic/circulatory' metaphor in which the different dimensions have the *potential* to combine, draw on and contribute to each other in ways to be established through the application of methodology. It is argued below that Fairclough's (1992) account of "discursive practice" (pp. 72ff), "interdiscursivity" (pp. 124ff) and the "archive" (p. 227) can provide these fluid, open connections between the dimensions of discourse.

Following Dawe (op. cit.), there is also the question of how to explain the macro-micro relationship in a way which leaves open for *discovery* how these features interrelate in particular settings - how to keep them continuously 'in play'. This is very much the

position taken in Layder's (op. cit.) account of the macro-micro problem, on which I draw in developing the theoretical framework, in Chapter 3.

To summarise, then, the chief ontological requirement for the theoretical framework developed for the current study is that it

- explains how the dimensions of discourse are potentially interconnected, within an account of the macro-micro relationship which does not, *a priori*, subordinate, underdevelop or exclude any of the dimensions.

The next section explains the methodological requirements for the framework.

#### **2.43 Methodological needs: the interdependence of ontology and methodology**

'Methodology' here refers here to what Silverman (1993, p. 2) has termed "a general approach to studying a research topic", which "establishes how one will go about studying any phenomena", is informed by "theories" regarding the nature of the social world, and has implications for the "specific research techniques" - or "methods" - appropriate to investigating it".

Methodology in this sense is closely related to the open-ended ontology envisaged for this study, a relationships which draws into focus the question of how to reconcile the influence on the research process of the analyst's ontological assumptions with the need for this process to allow the discovery of phenomena which may dispute these assumptions. The need to account for this relationship between ontology and methodology is a key requirement of Cicourel's (1992) call for 'accountability', which, as explained above, implies that the analyst both acknowledges that discourse analysis and discourse analytical data are situated within "interpenetrating contexts" (p. 309), and has an explicit



warrant to support the *quality* of such situated research. To meet this requirement, three related questions need to be addressed<sup>21</sup>. These are

- the ontological question, ‘What are the dimensions of discourse and how are they related to each other?’;
- the methodological question, ‘How can the analyst go about investigating them?’; and
- the epistemological question, ‘What is the analyst’s relationship to the dimensions and to their investigation?’.

The first question raises the ontological problem of explaining the features and relationships involved in the language/context nexus. The second question raises a key methodological problem. Paraphrasing Brown and Yule (op. cit., p. 50), this could be called the ‘problem of relevance’. It concerns how to establish which of the potentially infinite relations between the linguistic features of language, social practice, the broader social/institutional context and participant perspectives are salient to discourse in particular settings.

The answers to the first and second questions are related. On the one hand, the ontology will influence which data count as relevant to the analysis of discourse, and therefore which methodologies are used to investigate it. For example, the linguistic investigation of texts will be methodologically different from the investigation of social practices and participants’ perspectives. On the other hand, the use of different methodologies raises the question of how to ground the analysis of discourse in data representing each the dimensions, and how to combine these analyses in a coherent account of the discourse under scrutiny. These methodological decisions will in turn affect

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<sup>21</sup> These questions are adapted from Guba’s (1990, p. 18) general statement of the questions which are fundamental to the acquisition of empirical knowledge.

how the data analysis impacts on the ontology, whether this is a matter of developing, confirming or qualifying the ontology; or influencing “the way concepts are created and explored when substantive findings are obtained organized and analysed” (Cicourel, 1981, p. 64).

Hak (1999) has added a further way in which ontology and methodology are interdependent by shifting the argument for their interdependence back from the influence of methodological decisions to the resources available to researchers. Specifically, he argues that the methodological resources available to researchers create a “methodological imperative” which “prestructures” the problems they can identify and the questions they can ask (ibid., p. 443). In discourse analysis, Hak (ibid.) argues, this prestructuring has led to a bias towards the investigation of recordable language, isolating this kind of language from other forms of meaningful social action and defining it in opposition to the non-linguistic context.

These interdependencies of ontology and methodology make clear that the challenge of developing an ontology of discourse is mirrored in the challenge of developing a methodology with which to investigate it. In addressing this problem in the framework, below, I again draw on Layder’s work: this time, his recommendation to use ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to link data analysis to an emergent account of the macro-micro relationship (Layder, op. cit., pp. 53-54).

However, by drawing attention to the influence of the analyst’s decisions and resources on methodology, Cicourel and Hak also raise the third question, that of how the analyst is situated in relation to the context studied. On this point, Sarangi and Candlin (op. cit., p. 351) have argued that “theory and method are intricately intertwined” because decisions taken by the analyst are as much situated within the social context as those of the social participants being studied. They argue that, to meet Cicourel’s conditions, discourse analysts should reflect on and make explicit their “motivational relevancies” (ibid., pp.

368ff). These are the ways in which the analyst's interests, values and knowledge shape their ontological assumptions and methodological decisions. This information is important because it reveals the relationship between the analyst's perspective and that of the participants in the discourse under scrutiny. This relationship, they (ibid., p. 379) argue, determines whose "perspective on social data" the analysis reveals: namely, that of the participants aligned with, or transformed by, the analyst's perspective, "or some combination of the two". The challenge of reconciling this distinction between participants' and analysts' perspectives is, they observe, "the main methodological problematic that pervades both social theoretical and sociolinguistic studies of social life" (ibid.).

Through the notion of motivational relevancies, then, Sarangi and Candlin draw both ontological and methodological questions into the relationship between the analyst and participants. At the most general level, motivational relevancies include assumptions about the ontological status of social reality itself; for example, whether the social world consists of facts which persist independent of the perceptions of individuals, or whether these perceptions themselves constitute social reality (ibid., p. 377). In terms of the dimensions of discourse, motivational relevancies include the analyst's assumptions on the relationship between Duranti and Goodwin's (op. cit., p. 9ff) "figure" and "ground", as well as how to integrate the dimensions of discourse (Sarangi & Candlin, op. cit., p. 369).

As noted above, these ontological decisions in turn affect and are affected by methodological decisions on the appropriate focus of research and methods for investigating it. On the methodological side, then, motivational relevancies include questions which influence how the 'quality' of research is to be understood, as foreshadowed by Cicourel's (1992) call for accountability. These questions, Sarangi and Candlin (op. cit., pp. 370ff) argue, include the analyst's stance on what to investigate in doing discourse analysis: whether this involves searching for particular phenomena or

leaving the research design open to discovery; the role of description and explanation in researching discourse; and how the analyst values specific research methods. They (ibid., p. 383) conclude that in order to make explicit these decisions, and thereby clarify the social role of discourse analytical studies, “there is the need for... a reflexive alignment of our accounting practices” which would require that “one critically reflect on one’s own practices”.

This need for a reflexive understanding of the relationship between the analyst, research practices and participants is also taken up by Sarangi and Roberts (op. cit.: Roberts & Sarangi, 1999) who have also focused on how the analyst’s perspective connects ontology and methodology. Drawing on the work of Cameron et al. (1992), Sarangi and Roberts (op. cit., p. 41) have argued that the analyst is inevitably situated within the broader social context and therefore has a responsibility to pursue research “integrated” (p. 43) both with theory development and with advancing practitioners’ needs. They call the latter “practical relevance” (ibid.), and recommend that, because the kind of social change analysts pursue will reflect their orientations to social theory, “practical relevance and theoretical illuminations should resonate together” (ibid.). They advocate that the researcher should develop the practical relevance of a study by working *with* members of the institutional rather than *on* them, by involving them not merely as research subjects or recipients of findings, but in the process of research itself. This requires that the process of research becomes a “topic of reflexive scrutiny” (ibid., p. 39) for the researcher, and implies a relationship of “joint problematisation” (Roberts & Sarangi, op. cit., p. 473) with participants in the study.

With their emphases on how the analyst is reflexively situated within the research process and in relation to the participants, motivational relevancies and practical relevance highlight that discourse analysis itself is a socially-situated practice. These constructs therefore provide a starting point for developing a theoretical framework which addresses

the need for a reflexive understanding of the relationship between the analyst, the study and the participants, and in doing so meets Cicourel's requirement that researchers acknowledge that they, along with their research practices, are themselves socially-situated.

## **2.5 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Summarising the requirements identified in this chapter, the challenge is to integrate the ontology and methodology in a theoretical framework which addresses the following questions:

1. how the dimensions of discourse are potentially interconnected, in an account of the macro-micro relationship which does not, *a priori*, subordinate any of the dimensions;
2. how motivational relevancies and practical relevance inform the analyst's perspective, and thereby position the analyst in relation to the participants;
3. what methodological traditions to draw on in operationalising the different dimensions of discourse;
4. how to ground the analysis of discourse in data representing all the dimensions of discourse; and
5. how to combine the analyses in drawing conclusions about the discourse under scrutiny.

In the next chapter, these questions are addressed in developing the theoretical framework for the study.