

# MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

## HIGHER DEGREE THESIS (PhD)

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a major part of the prescribed program of study.



**Joint book-reading and literacy pedagogy:  
A socio-semantic examination**

**Volume 1**

**Geoff Williams**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

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## **Certificate of Original Submission**

I certify that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Williams', written over a horizontal line.

**Geoff Williams**

### Abstract

The study contributes to the fields of educational linguistics and semantic variation by examining linguistic interaction during joint book-reading between mothers and four-year-old children, and between teachers and Kindergarten classes at the beginning of school.

Joint book-reading was selected because of its centrality to the metaphor of a partnership between home and school in children's literacy development. The problem for the study was to investigate possible systematic semantic variation in linguistic interaction associated with social class locations of speakers, and relations between any such variants and features of interaction in joint book-reading in Kindergarten.

A preliminary survey of 427 families in two socio-geographically contrasted sites established that joint book-reading was a common social practice, and gave sufficient indications of variation to justify an intensive socio-semantic study. Two sets of ten mother-child dyads, contrasted for class locations using Bernstein's (1990) theory of class relations, were constructed and recordings of joint book-reading sessions made by mothers. Recordings of interaction in two sets of ten Kindergarten classes in the same socio-geographical areas were made by teachers.

Vygotsky's theory of semiotic mediation was the general resource used for interpreting children's learning, but it was necessary to resolve problems in the theory in the modelling of contexts for learning, and of mediational means. For this purpose the systemic functional linguistic concept of context of situation, as proposed by Halliday (1978) and expanded by Hasan (in press (a)), was deployed.

Transcripts of recordings were analysed through a semantic network developed for the study, based on a network proposed by Hasan (1983).

Semantic variation associated with class locations of families was found across all four metafunctions described within systemic theory, and one variant found to be associated with Kindergarten classroom interaction. The variable semantic features were interpreted as the realization of different principles regulating the individuation of experience, using Bernstein's theories of coding orientation and pedagogic discourse.

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