CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1   The study

A complex relationship has developed during the last 15 years
between children's informal literacy learning in families and
pedagogies of the first phase of school literacy instruction.
This study examines a specific, highly prominent aspect of
this relationship, the activity of adults reading books to
young children in families and schools.

Caregivers no doubt have many reasons for engaging children's
attention by reading to them, from the short-term necessity to
distract or amuse them to more self-conscious attempts to
persuade them to adopt particular social and personal
attitudes. Typically the activity is regarded as one of the
most intimate and gentle occasions in domestic life.
Consider, for example, the image of Hans Christian Andersen
reading to the Collin children in Copenhagen, or of the
severely disabled baby Cushla entertained, against all
expectation, by her parents reading to her during the wakeful
and painful early morning hours (Butler, 1979).

In the normal course of events it would be rare for the
activity to be thought of as implicating deep principles of
social organisation, the role of the education system in this
organisation and the part family interaction plays in the
creation, maintenance and change of this system. In what
follows I will attempt to show that however natural joint
book-reading may superficially appear to be, it is both a
socially differentiated and differentiating linguistic
environment which does in fact implicate crucial principles of
social organisation.

The general problem is not that the practice has remained
unexamined by previous scholars. In fact, as the discussion
in Chapter Two will show, during the last decade it has been a

topic of extensive research interest. Nor is the problem that a potential for variation between social groups in the nature of this activity has been overlooked. Some major research studies, some conducted over lengthy periods with relatively large groups of participants, have provided clear indications of variation in the practice between social groups.

The problem is, rather, that there has been no systematic and detailed linguistic study which explicates what variant practices are in joint book-reading, with what social features of speakers they correlate, why these relations might have arisen, and how the variant practices are positioned in relation to school discourse, since they cannot all possess equivalent status in that discourse. This study will attempt to address some aspects of the problem.

1.2   Joint book-reading and the notion of partnership in children's literacy development

A good deal of recent pedagogical discourse deploys the metaphor of a partnership between home and school in children's literacy learning, constructing a sense of a natural relation between practices in the two sites. Certain family literacy practices have been found to contribute to children's early success in schooled literacy and, in direct consequence, changes have been made to pedagogical practice to attempt to mirror the desired family practices. Joint book-reading is preeminently the practice implicated in these relations.

Metaphors of partnership are common, for example, in recent publications by the Primary English Teaching Association and the Australian Reading Association, publications such as *Parents, teachers, partners* (Dwyer, 1989) and *Beyond tokenism: Parents as partners in literacy* (Cairney and Munsie, 1992; see also Nalder, 1989; Cairney, 1994). In a pedagogic text which has been widely circulated in both Britain and Australia Waterland uses a closely related metaphor of an organic, meronymic relation between home and school literacies:

Reading at home is the root system that feeds the apprenticed reader; if the people at home understand and support what we are doing, everything at school will be made much easier (Waterland, 1988:17).

Joint book-reading is discussed under a variety of names, such as 'shared reading' or 'big book' reading, but so far as the family is concerned the defining feature is that caregiver and child attend to meanings in a published written text. The text may involve graphic semiosis which elaborates, and often extends, the linguistic meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1990). Object text meanings may be read directly, or constructed orally by the caregiver as she 'adapts' the text for the child. Sometimes a reading is produced jointly, when the text is very familiar, by a kind of linguistic duet between child and caregiver. A range of different types of text may be selected, though in the literature narrative assumes the most prominent place and some authors have attributed specific literacy development effects to it (Teale, 1984; Wells, 1985a; 1985b; 1987b). The status that joint book-reading has come to enjoy is succinctly stated by the authors of a recent text in *The Developing Child* Series published by Harvard University Press. They comment:

Possibly the most important reading activity for young children is being read to. A considerable body of research has confirmed the link between being read to and later learning to read successfully in school (McLane and McNamee, 1990:6).

In an earlier, highly influential statement about the benefits of joint book-reading the Bullock Report commented:

It has been said that the best way to prepare the very young child for reading is to hold him on your lap and read aloud to him stories that he likes, over and over again. The printed page, the physical comfort and security, the reassuring voice, the fascination of the story: all these combine in the child's mind to identify books as something which hold great pleasure. This is the most valuable piece of advice that a parent can be given (Bullock, 1975:97).

In commending the activity the Committee of Inquiry drew on emerging research evidence[1] which associated joint book-

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1   The report refers explicitly to comments by Lefevre in *Linguistics and the teaching of reading* (1964). Additionally, some of the expert witnesses to the Inquiry were prominent researchers in this field, such as Dr M Clark, whose work will be discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.2.

reading in the home with early literacy success in school. This general type of study will be further discussed in the following chapter.

By 1989, in the influential Australian text *Parents, teachers, partners* (Dwyer, 1989), joint book-reading had undergone a significant shift in pedagogical relations. It had become not only a highly valued activity in both home and school literacy practices, but specific forms of it had assumed a normative function in pedagogic texts addressed to both parents and teachers. The shift of activity, from an apparently everyday practice in families to a complex set of relations between, and within, school pedagogic discourse is itself a phenomenon which stands in need of deep research and analysis.

In one specific sense it may be claimed that research had preceded the creation of this partnership. Prior to compiling *Parents, teachers, partners* the Primary English Teaching Association, based in Sydney, conducted an informal survey which 'on a conservative estimate' was said to reach 'between 40,000 and 50,000 parents and teachers'. The survey was

> an attempt to discover their [parents] major concerns about primary schooling, the questions they would like answered and the topics they would like covered in a book specially written with them in mind (ibid., 1).

It thus represents an important attempt by one of the most influential professional associations for primary school teachers in Australia to address relations between home and school learning, an attempt which does not have any parallel in pedagogic materials produced at this time by the State.

The metaphor of partnership is, as would be imagined, prominent in the Association's response to parents' questions. 'True partnership is present' it is said 'when caring adults in both home and school work supporting each other in the interest of the child'. Further, 'even the formal side of schooling *must* build on the home experiences of the child' (Dwyer, ibid., 2-3, original emphasis).

The paragraph which follows the latter comment signifies the complexity of the relations which had begun to develop between home and school literacy practices in Australia by this time:

> Children who come from homes that are rich in language - where people enjoy talking and listening to each other, where anecdotes are told and stories are read - have been wonderfully prepared for schooling generally, and particularly for reading (ibid., 2).

This normative statement of the types of 'homes' best equipped to enter the partnership is expanded later in the report in a section devoted to reading:

> A home rich in language - where people love words and stories, where tales are told and books are read, where parents model interesting speech and are seen to be readers and writers, and where children are just expected to be the same - such a home prepares the child to move naturally and inevitably into reading (ibid., 22).

The text then goes on to reveal 'a very significant secret' concerning children's reading development. This secret is in fact the Bullock Report endorsement of joint book-reading quoted earlier. Its 'revelation' is followed by a comment that:

> We would dramatically improve the standard of reading of Australian children - and consequently their standard of learning - if only we could persuade all parents to read regularly to their children from the earliest age (ibid., 22).

The practice of reading, and forms of interaction interspersed through it, are the subject of advice. Suggestions are made to parents about how to read to a child and about the questions which should be asked during joint book-reading, questions such as 'Why do you think he did that?' and 'What would you have done if ... ?' (ibid., 24). The ease and 'naturalness' of children's literacy learning of which this text speaks is thus also considered to be an *effect* of a normative pedagogic discourse. The discourse values practices which may be anything but natural in a significant proportion of social locations.

The construction of norms for parents to follow in developing children's literacy is not isolated to one country or professional association. The International Reading

Association, for example, reproduced the following ten
commandments for parents, which originated in the Parent
Committee of the Michigan Reading Association.

Ten Commandments for Parents

1. I will read to my child daily.
2. I will help my child start a word collection of at least one unknown word
    daily.
3. I will listen to my child read daily.
4. I will take dictation (talk written down) of the stories, poems and sayings my
    child creates.
5. I will help my child pursue an interest and find five books to read on the
    topic.
6. I will praise my child for at least one success daily.
7. I will arrange for my child to use the library and visit bookstores or counters
    to select his or her own books.
8. I will help my child find a listener to read to (another child, grandparent or
    friend).
9. I will allow my child to buy books and educational games.
10. I will listen to my child daily about his or her school reading of stories and
    progress in learning to read (quoted in Goldfield and Snow, 1984:204-5).

1.3   Some general priorities for research in joint book-reading

The notion of a partnership for children's literacy
development, of an easy collaboration between home and school,
obviously assumes that all families, irrespective of their
social positioning, can easily and voluntarily adopt
interactive practices during joint book-reading that are
similar to those in the schools.

However, while the discourse of literacy pedagogy foregrounds
a desirable commonality between home and school reading
practices, it is of course *difference* in literacy as sets of
situated sociocultural practices which is the thematic
foregrounded in many other research fields. Difference, and
the necessary plurality of literacies in different social
formations, has been almost a dominant theme in fields as
diverse as, for example, the history of literacies (Cressy,
1980; Graf 1987), literacy, culture and cognition (Cook-
Gumperz, 1986a; Goody, 1987; Heath, 1982b, 1983; Ong, 1982;
Scribner and Cole, 1981; Scollon and Scollon, 1981; Street,
1984, 1993), school writing and the development of 'critical
literacies' (Christie, 1990; Lemke, 1990a; Luke and Gilbert,

1993), feminism and literacies (Christian-Smith, 1993; Cranny-Francis, 1992; Gilbert, 1990, 1992; Poynton, 1985), and in critiques of relations between ideology, discourses and educational practices (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Hasan, in press(b); Kress, 1985, 1987; Gee, 1990). Such a list is merely a minimal indication of the extent of the thematic interest in differences between literacies.

Additionally, many scholars draw attention to the dynamic nature of contemporary literacies, of difference in practices in the one set of social locations over time, as for example in changes in relations between literacy and other forms of semiosis, particularly forms of visual semiosis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1990), and changes in workplace contexts, where literacy has assumed a new significance in defining work competencies (Baylis, Caldwell and Nussbaum, 1991; Joyce, 1992; see also Harvey, 1989).

The general consistency of findings of a multiplicity of literacies in social formations suggests that many families could adopt the projected homogenised joint book-reading practices only with the greatest difficulty. This is not only because practices in families will vary idiosyncratically but also, in some way yet to be investigated closely, because they will be related to deep and pervasive principles of social structure.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of social structure requiring detailed analysis is the influence of social class. A large range of sociolinguistic studies, developed from diverse theoretical perspectives, suggests that social class is a primary determinant of difference in language use. Labov, for example, writing in 1966 commented that:

> Socio-economic class is one of the most important elements of social structure in complex urban communities, and correlation with the linguistic variables immediately shows a strong relation (Labov, 1966b:12).

Additionally, transmission of inequity between social classes through schooled literacy practices is a major current interest of educational linguists and critical theorists. A recent report to the Australian Federal government on preservice preparation of teachers of literacy commented that

> research in the sociology of education over the past three decades has clearly demonstrated that learners' class positioning has a major impact on their orientation to language and meaning, and that the language of the school clearly privileges learners from privileged economic backgrounds over learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Christie, 1991b:137).

And writing recently about social class and reading pedagogy in Australia, Freebody commented:

> Debate about the relationship of literacy to social class is subordinate to a more inclusive, long-standing debate about language use and its relationship to class-based 'codes' ... Recently, literacy has been more directly implicated in the class issue as its role in 'forms of knowing' and 'constructing subjectivities' has been developed (Freebody, 1993:68).

Freebody indicates a theoretical rather than empirical relation of subordination, since in the research and pedagogical literature it is rare to find that schooled literacy development is discussed in terms of the prior effects of social class on the formation of consciousness (cf. Hasan, 1987).

Though discussion of effects of social class on early schooled writing development has figured prominently in recent educational linguistic work (for example, Painter and Martin, 1986; Reid, 1987), this degree of interest has not so far extended to early reading development. In some contrast with writing research, in Australia and to a large extent also in North America and the UK, correlation between school reading achievement and children's social class locations is most often studied in relation to the later years of schooling[2].

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2   See Freebody (1993) for a critique of the 'backyarding' of some effects of social class relations in statistical regression analyses of secondary school literacy learning in Australia.

There are, of course, some important studies of correlations
between early schooled reading achievement and social class
and these will be considered in some detail in the following
chapter. These exceptions notwithstanding, the enormously
powerful diagnostic and remediation apparatus of early
literacy pedagogy constructs difficulty, reading difficulty in
particular, as typically an individual 'deficiency' (eg,
Adams, 1990; cf. Church and Newman, 1985; Meek, with Armstrong
et al., 1983).

Many aspects of variation in literacy practices, potentially
correlated with social class, might be studied. Of these it
is talk around the text which is the object of shared
attention which is most crucial. This is because qualities of
interactive talk are argued to be the major resource for
literacy learning in joint book-reading (eg, Wells, 1985a;
1987). Since written textual meanings are not usually
accessible directly to young children, meanings of object
texts are *mediated through* talk during joint book-reading. It
is, thus, an environment where the force of Vygotsky's notion
of 'semiotic mediation' (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5) can be
examined closely, and an environment where claims that
semiotic mediation is not invariant but is sensitive to
speakers' social positioning can be tested (Hasan, 1992b).
There is a significant discursive potential in joint book-
reading talk for systematically variable interactive practices
to be deployed, correlated with social class location of
speakers.

From recent work in semantic variation (eg, Hasan, 1989) there
are strong reasons for supposing that everyday talk in
families will be highly sensitive to social class locations,
and in fact to realize different orientations to orders of
relevance of meanings. Hasan and her colleagues have been
able to demonstrate both the semantic sensitivity of talk to
speakers' social locations and, critically, a strong
association between one variant of everyday talk and certain
significant configurations of meanings typical of Kindergarten

classroom discourse (eg, Hasan, 1989, 1991b; Hasan and Cloran, 1990). Their work thus suggests that the orders of relevance of meanings in these new school contexts are much more congruent with the home discourses of children from some social class locations than they are for others (Bernstein, 1990).

By analysing interactive talk during joint book-reading in home and school sites in considerable detail this study attempts to contribute both to the fields of semantic variation and educational linguistics.

1.4   Overview

In broad terms the tasks which the present study addresses are:

i   the development of a framework for the description of the semantic features of the language of interaction which occurs during joint book-reading, both at home and in the first few months of the first year of school;

ii   using this framework, analysis of the language of interaction during joint book-reading in families with different social positioning;

iii   similar analysis of the language of interaction during the first few months of formal schooling;

iv   exploration of possible variation in the language of interaction between:

   a.   families, with respect to their social positioning;

   b.   schools, by reference to the social positioning of the students;

   c.   families in contrasted social positions and schools.

v.   development of a theoretically systematic interpretation of the findings, using some existing models of sociological description.

As the account of this study proceeds it will hopefully become obvious that the theoretical perspective adopted here differs in important ways from those adopted in earlier studies. In particular, in this study the sayings of mothers, children and teachers have been investigated in some linguistic detail, clause by clause, in order to describe possible variant ways of meaning in the ways of saying mothers and teachers employ during joint book-reading (Hasan, 1984b).

First, however, it will be useful to consider aspects of relations between home and school joint book-reading as described in the discourse of literacy pedagogy. This is done in Chapter Two, where I also draw attention to the variety of sources in psychological, linguistic and educational work which has left its mark on pedagogic texts over the last 15 years. This work includes, of course, some significant studies of variation. Of particular interest will be the means used in these studies to theorise differences between social formations and their relations with varying linguistic practices. I will argue that Vygotsky's theory of semiotic mediation is problematically employed in both research and pedagogy in this field. In order to make this evident, Chapter Two also includes a discussion of relevant aspects of Vygotsky's theory. I will go on, however, to critique Vygotsky's position on linguistic semiosis as a mediational means from the perspective of semantic variation theory. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of relations between research in the field and three sample texts in the discourse of literacy pedagogy.

Chapter Three presents the specific purposes, structure and data-gathering methodologies of the study, including a discussion of the theoretical resources through which different social class locations were described, and of the research strategies used to select participants from within those locations.

The focus of Chapters Four and Five is the linguistic theory and analytic framework which enabled me to investigate interaction from the necessary perspective of context of language use as a descriptive linguistic stratum. The investigation depended on a description of context of situation only recently articulated within systemic functional linguistics. Since it is not widely known it is described in some detail.

Many aspects of the analytic framework were developed specifically for this study, as refinements of Hasan's (1983) pioneering work on semantic networks. They are also presented in detail so that the description of interactive practices in the contrasted social class locations is made as explicitly as possible within the constraint of available space.

Two perspectives on the results of the semantic analysis are adopted. Chapter Six describes somewhat discursively the semantic variation found in the interaction of three mother-child dyads where the same story, *The three little pigs*, happens to be read. This chapter thus introduces the use of the semantic analysis and attempts to show how selection of some semantic features is differently distributed across social locations. Chapter Seven, on the other hand, reports results of analysis for the whole family data set and examines the frequency of occurrence of significantly varying semantic features in classroom discourse.

Chapters Eight and Nine are concerned with the interpretation of these results, and introduce theoretical means through which the variability of the family interaction and the differential relations of variants to school discourse might be understood.

The study concludes with a review of theoretical and methodological resources, and a brief indication of the significance of the findings for early literacy research and pedagogy.

CHAPTER TWO

Research in Joint Book-reading and the Discourse of Literacy Pedagogy

2.1   Introduction

Joint book-reading has been a popular topic of pedagogical research during the last 20 years. This chapter investigates aspects pertinent to a socio-semantic study of variation in family interaction.

I will begin by examining two important sources of contemporary interest: a specific research text in child language development which rapidly achieved influence in the research field, and correlational studies of home factors associated with the early attainment of reading. Findings from these studies were used extensively to develop the notion of 'emergent' literacy. The various meanings of this term are now important to an understanding of the strategic status of joint book-reading in the discourse of literacy pedagogy. I will attempt to demonstrate the mixture of theoretical positions on which it currently draws.

Some studies of joint book-reading have examined children's learning through linguistic interaction specifically. A review of this work will first indicate commonly foregrounded features of interaction as a resource for children's learning, and then the pertinence of two theoretical difficulties for a study of variation: (1) problems arising from the selective use of Vygotskian theory; (2) treatments of the notions of 'context'. The first of these will require a theoretical excursus to re-read key aspects of Vygotsky's theory. Through this excursus it will emerge that, though the theory is profoundly important to an understanding of children's literacy development, there are some inherent problems in the form Vygotsky proposed the theory. They concern the modelling of variable semiotic mediation and are, in fact, closely

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associated with the uncertainties about 'context' foregrounded in the initial research review.

In consequence, it is necessary to examine very closely how previous writers have portrayed linguistic variation in joint book-reading, and how they have interpreted its social correlates. There is a complex inter-relationship between the modelling of social context and the interpretation of specific findings.

On the basis of these analyses it will then be possible to examine some signal examples of professional teaching handbooks which use research to support joint book-reading as a pedagogic strategy in schooled literacy. Though relations between research and professional texts in the discourse of literacy pedagogy are always complex, this is particularly so in the case of joint book-reading. Some of the most pertinent issues will be introduced in the concluding movement of this chapter. Subsequently in Chapter Nine, following the presentation of findings from this study, I will advance a more theoretically focussed and critical reading of them.

2.2 Early research interest in joint book-reading practices

Two influential sets of discourse about the significance of joint book-reading can be identified. One set derives from detailed study of conversational interaction in children's early language development, and the specific contribution of joint book-reading to this development. The other derives from analysis of general background factors contributing to children's precociousness in learning to read.

Of the first set of studies, the most influential was Ninio and Bruner's analysis (1978) of an individual mother reading to her son between the ages of 0:8 months and 1:6 months. It achieved influence partly because of findings about the particular contribution of joint book-reading to early oral language development, but it is also very significant because

of the theory implicit in the interpretation of the findings.
This theory was a departure from the assumptions
simultaneously being employed in other studies of pre-school
literacy development.

Ninio and Bruner focussed on joint book-reading in the first
instance because this appeared to be the activity during which
the mother's teaching of labelling occurred. In an analysis
of 12 thirty-minute periods of interaction in 'normal play',
which included book-reading, 75.6% of those occasions on which
the child's mother provided labels involved pictures rather
than manipulable objects. The authors argue that because the
labels usually applied to pictures the child was assisted in
learning that a linguistic label is an element separate from
an object itself. Ninio and Bruner were amongst the first to
consider the particular contribution of joint book-reading to
semiotic abstraction.

An account of several specific linguistic features of the
interaction was developed on the basis of transcripts from
video-taped interactions in the home. One feature was the
highly routinised structure of the interaction. This, Ninio
and Bruner argued, was a significant element in maintaining
the child's focus of attention, thus providing a necessary
condition for the productive introduction of labels. Further,
the routinised situation was one in which language itself
achieved particular prominence. They commented that

> to begin with, the variety of the mother's utterances in book-reading is very limited:
> she makes repeated use of four key utterance types. These are the ATTENTIONAL VOCATIVE
> *Look*, the QUERY *What's that?*, the LABEL *It's an x*, and the FEEDBACK UTTERANCE *yes*
> (Ninio and Bruner, 1978:6).

Routinisation was also evident in the order of utterances,
which provided a basis for the mother to interpret active
protoconversational moves by the child to express meaning.
These were understood to be the child 'taking over one or more
of the elements in the labelling routine' (ibid., 9). In
fact, a range of features suggest the protoconversational
nature of the interaction and the importance of the mother's

attribution of an intention to mean to the child. The
consistent responsiveness of the mother to the child's turns
was an important element of this attribution. Ninio and
Bruner noted:

> The mother usually responds to the child's turns by a new turn of her own (72.3%)
> within the same cycle. This tendency to continue to discuss a particular picture if
> the child seems to be interested in it undergoes very little change as the child grows
> older ... The mother reciprocated equally to the child's response whether it was vocal
> or gestural ... (ibid., 9).

The issue of maternal responsiveness and linguistic
reciprocity was itself to become a major theme in the
subsequent research literature.

Associated with this general finding, Ninio and Bruner
provided a range of evidence about the importance of the
mother's 'theory of the child' in influencing her acceptance
of vocalizations as approximations to standard lexical items.
In particular, they noted the mother's demand for further
effort once she knew that the child could produce a particular
approximation, when less adequate vocalizations were produced.
The mother also directly corrected the child's use of
inaccurate labels, with no consequent loss of usage of the
terms, as had been argued by other scholars. The sense of
change in the interaction over time is of the mother moving
the child forward to approximate her own use of language, both
in the use of the lexical terms and in the reciprocity of the
dialogue. Ninio and Bruner conclude with the observation that

> a central element in the achievement of labelling by the child is his mastery of the
> reciprocal dialogue rules that govern the exchanges between him and his mother into
> which labelling is inserted. Reference, then, is dependent not only upon mastering a
> relationship between sign and significate, but upon an understanding of social rules
> for achieving dialogue in which that relationship can be realized (ibid., 15).

The emphasis here on learning through social interaction,
realistic evaluation of attempts to approximate adult usage
and the development of voluntary attention by the child
through the use of linguistic semiosis, all suggest a quite
direct link with Vygotsky's theory though his writing is not

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referenced[1]. A good deal of subsequent research into joint book-reading was also to utilise this theory, though it is important to examine which aspects of his theoretical proposals were selected, and to explore the significance of what has been elided from the theory in later research in joint book-reading.

One aspect of interest in joint book-reading, then, came initially from certain general studies of child language development, particularly in the development of aspects such as labelling and protoconversation. Ninio and Bruner show that joint book-reading may have a prominent, if not distinctive, role in the development of labelling. But, equally importantly, the research suggested that there may be other characteristics of language in this environment which contribute distinctively, if not uniquely, to forms of literate activity.

Correlational studies of children's success in learning to read early, such as those of Durkin (1966) and Clark (1976) were another very important influence on subsequent research and pedagogical texts. Both had shown that a significant factor in accounting for children's early literacy achievements was joint book-reading in the family. Both researchers were primarily concerned to challenge the dominant pedagogical model of 'reading readiness'[2], and they easily demonstrated that it was seriously flawed because many children came to school already able to read without the benefit of training in such 'sub-skills' specific to literacy as visual and auditory acuity, and visual and auditory memory.

Relations between the social class background of the parents, their levels of education and the precociousness of the

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1   Bruner (1985) provides an account of his early contact with Vygotskian theory in 1954, and its subsequent contribution to his work.

2   The pedagogical concept of reading readiness, which was used to restrict specific reading instruction until children had attained a mental age of 6.6 years, may be traced to research by Morphett and Washburne (1931).

child's literacy development were of particular interest to Clark. She found that amongst the 32 families in her study there were six in which both parents had left school with no 'final certificate'. On the basis of interviews with the parents she argued that

> The richness and support for education which these and several other families in the study were providing was not measurable on scales such as social class, father's occupation, mother's education - or even number of books in the house. ... The lesson from these interviews was a clear one that it is crucial to explore the parents' perceptions of education and the support and experiences they provide by measures far more sensitive and penetrating than social class, father's occupation - or even education of the parents (Clark, 1976:45).

This comment raises many issues of interpretation, and of the *nature* of relations between social class background and orientations to literacy which will be discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine. One aspect, however, requires particular comment at this point, as background to the subsequent discussion of variation in interaction in joint book-reading. What Clark's analysis provides is correlational evidence that working class children who learned to read early were read to at home. It does not show that working class children who were read to at home generally learned to read early or even that they entered school literacy effectively. These are two rather different questions.

Such challenges as those of Clark and Durkin to the metaphor of a specific, school-initiated point of origin for children's reading, together with Clay's early research in New Zealand into the range of reading behaviours children showed at school entry (Clay, 1967; 1979), led directly to the production of a new metaphor, that of 'emergent' literacy. For example, in introducing their influential text, *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading*, Teale and Sulzby (1986b) suggest that the findings from Durkin's and Clay's study were crucial in changing the dominance of the reading readiness metaphor and the associated evaluative practices over school instruction. It was a considerable change because the readiness metaphor and associated practices had, through support in the form of published reading schemes, achieved almost universal usage in

early literacy pedagogy in English in the West. In its turn
the notion of emergent literacy has achieved considerable
effects in Australia especially and requires careful analysis.

2.3   Emergent literacy
The metaphor of the 'emergent' nature of literacy is a complex
and ambiguous construction. As well, it is crucial to
interpreting relationships between research on joint book-
reading and pedagogical practices. Since the historical
background to it has been outlined quite extensively by Teale
and Sulzby (1986b) the focus here will be specifically on
assertions about its meaning during the middle years of the
last decade.

The advantages of the term 'emergent literacy' as given by
Teale and Sulzby (1986(b):viiff.) can be summarized
economically under three major heads.

i.   Development
It follows from the disjunction with 'reading readiness' that
the new metaphor is used to signify development over time, and
the significance for later forms of literate behaviour of what
has been learned before school entry. For example, Teale and
Sulzby comment that

> Emergent connotes development rather than stasis.   ... At whatever point we look, we
> see children in the process of becoming literate, as the term emergent indicates
> (ibid., xix).

There is also an intentional polarity here with strict
behaviourist models of reading development, as with Chall's
label of a Stage 0 (Chall, 1967).

ii.   Continuity of early forms with mature forms of
         literate cultural practices

'Emergent' is intended to signify that in many ways mature
forms of literate behaviour are the same as earlier forms.
Teale and Sulzby comment:

> Throughout children's early literacy experiences, many of the motives, functions and
> uses associated with writing and reading and the psycholinguistic processes employed in
> writing and reading are identical to those [?of] adults and other literate persons
> (ibid., xx).

This is a significant formulation because, through the use of
the generic plural 'children', the statement glosses three
separate issues: continuity of 'emergent' forms of children's
literacy with literacy practices in families; continuity
between a child's early literacy experiences in the home and
instructional literacy practices in schools; and continuity
between instructional literacy practices and those of other
institutions, as for example literacies in workplaces.
Interestingly, Teale and Sulzby actually cite the work of
Heath (1983) in support of their argument, though subsequently
it will be argued that this work is a direct challenge to the
generality of the formulation.

iii.   Natural Development

'Emergent' also signifies the dynamic inner change in
individual children, with the sociocultural 'environment'
largely in the role of motivator. For example,

> Growth in reading and writing comes from within the child and as the result of
> environmental stimulation (ibid., xx).

The wording here aligns 'emergent' with Piaget's view of
cognitive development where, provided the social environment
is sufficiently 'enabling', the requisite cognitive
structures, including those essential to the emergence of
literacy, will necessarily evolve. In fact Teale and Sulzby
use Piagetian terminology to explicate these processes,
arguing that 'learning builds through processes of

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assimilation and accommodation' (ibid., xx). A direct
consequence of this view is that 'teaching' is backgrounded.

> Furthermore, the growth that has been observed occurs without the necessity for formal
> teaching. Instead, it results from the use of writing and reading in the everyday
> contexts of home and community (ibid., xx).

'Formal' is in itself an ambiguous term in this field. Does
it imply, for example, 'formal' as in school institutional
practices? These seem to be excluded by definition since the
behaviours arise in 'everyday' contexts. Or, more
specifically, is 'formal' co-extensive with 'behaviourist
pedagogy', giving an opposition to drill-and-practice regimes
of the first phase of reading schemes? Or, again, is 'formal'
co-extensive with 'explicit', and if so, explicit teaching
about what aspects of literacy? The ambiguous[3] formulation
had a quite direct effect on pedagogic texts.

The new discourse about 'emergent' literacy tended to depend
theoretically on an orientation to the effects of the 'social'
in literacy development which was importantly different from
Ninio and Bruner's analysis. This is a complex point because
social interaction between caregivers and children is quite
central to a theory of emergent literacy. The problem is not
so much that influences of social interaction are
unacknowledged: rather, it is how the 'social' is
conceptualised that is critical. Theoretically, the
orientation of much work on emergent literacy has
commonalities with a pedagogic *bricolage* to which Bernstein
(eg, 1990:68-9) has drawn attention.

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[3]   Not all scholars working in the field of joint book-reading are ambivalent about the
role of explicit teaching. Thomas, who studied home background factors in 15 early
readers aged between 4.5 and 5.9, is critical of writers who play down the active
teaching role of parents, commenting

> ... it is both an oversimplification and an injustice to the parents in this study to
> suggest that reading acquisition was the sole and natural act of the child. *Indeed,
> the time, the social interaction, the clarification of linguistic/literacy factors, and
> the systematic approach to print engaged in by these parents of early readers would be
> called exemplary teaching if done in the classroom by teachers who turned out such
> successful beginning readers* (Thomas, 1985:473, original emphasis).

Bernstein's specific interest in examining this *bricolage* was the implicit sequencing rules through which children's development is 'read' in schooling contexts. He drew attention to commonalities between certain theories, such as Piagetian, Freudian, Chomskian, ethological and Gestalt theories, which have informed teacher preparation courses for a long period. The commonalities form the basis on which children's development is often professionally interpreted. Bernstein's formulation was:

> First, almost all of the theories, with the exception of Gestalt, is a developmental theory. ... Second, in every one of these theories the child is active in his or her own acquisition. Third, in all these theories the acquisition of the child cannot readily be modified by explicit public regulation, as learning is a tacit, invisible act. Fourth, in every one of these theories the child's institutional and cultural biography is excluded. The theories are asociological. At most the child has a family. Fifth, in every one of these theories, except the ethological, the relationship between the transmitter and acquirer or the parent and the child is such that the socializer is potentially if not actually dangerous. ... Every one of these theories, except the ethological, replaces domination by facilitation, imposition by accommodation (ibid., 69).

In contrast to the projection of an image of natural development, in Ninio and Bruner's account interaction between the child, his mother and the text which is the object of their joint attention is the *semiotic resource* from which and through which more mature forms of labelling (and attention and conversation) are constructed. This analysis implicates a quite different sense of the 'social', though obviously Ninio and Bruner did not themselves develop a sociological account of the ontogenesis of literacy since this was beyond the purpose of their description. Interestingly, though, the difference in theoretical orientation is not usually acknowledged in subsequent research texts which cite Ninio and Bruner's work. In almost every case these authors are interpreted as supporting a 'naturalistic' or 'informal' theory of early literacy development.

Joint book-reading has been the activity most central to the discursive deployment of emergent literacy in pedagogic discourse. It has been described in a large number of

studies, which are the subject of analysis in the following
section.

2.4   Studies of interactive language in joint book-reading and literacy learning

Research literature in this field typically comprises case
studies of individual children or of small groups observed
over periods of six to twelve months. Some of these studies
acknowledge the relativity of the descriptions to a specific
location in social formations, taking account of the import of
Heath's work. An apposite example is Bloome's (1985b)
'microanalysis' of message units in his consideration of
'bedtime reading as a social process'. However, this
orientation is not typical of the substantial majority of
studies in the field.

Despite the voluminous literature only relatively few studies
analyse language use itself in joint book-reading. Writing
ten years ago Teale observed:

> How the activity of reading to children might be characterized has more or less been a
> nonissue in educational research. Studies ... that investigated the correlations
> between preschool experience in being read to and achievement in literacy have
> generally paid little attention to defining or describing what constitutes a book-
> reading episode (Teale, 1984:111).

A rather similar judgement could be made in 1994, though there
has been a plethora of portrayals of the positive effects of
joint book-reading. The literature includes many commonsense
arguments about children's increased motivation for reading,
increased vocabulary associated with the specific language of
object texts, increased knowledge of grammatical features of
written language, increased familiarity with structures of
narrative and so on. There are, though, comparatively few
studies which investigate exchanges of linguistic meanings.

In this analysis attention will be confined to those studies
which do give specific attention to language use, even if they
do not include close analysis of it or attempt to theorize its
contributions to children's development of thinking about

literacy. There are two foci for the analysis: commonalities in findings, and recurring difficulties in approaches to research in the field. For the latter issue those studies which use a social interactionist explanatory model without a *systematic* account of the role of language as a resource for children's learning will be of particular interest.

The quality of talk which is most discussed in joint book-reading research is the linguistic reciprocity of the mother to the child's attempts to mean. There are several facets to this quality. One is the notion of 'semantic contingency'. Snow defines the concept in the following way:

> Adult utterances are semantically contingent if they continue topics introduced by the child's preceding utterances. Semantically contingent utterances thus include: (1) expansions, which are limited to the content of the previous child utterance; (2) semantic extensions, which add new information to the topic; (3) clarifying questions, which demand clarification of the child utterance; and (4) answers to child questions. Topic initiations by adult speakers and attempts to switch the topic from the one introduced by the child constitute semantically noncontingent speech, and the frequency of such utterances in parents' speech correlates negatively with children's gains in language ability (Snow, 1983:167).

The crucial 'positive' feature here is the way the caregiver follows the child's initiative and builds further discourse from it. Snow's method of argument is representative of much of this literature, which is to exemplify the phenomenon from transcript data of an individual child reading with his mother.

In accounts of semantic contingency emphasis is typically given to logico-semantic, textual and some interpersonal aspects of the conversation concerned with turntaking (Halliday, 1985a). Experiential and other interpersonal features such as modality are not discussed. There is, of course, no theoretical reason to prevent the development of a more delicate description using experiential and further interpersonal features, but this does not occur in the literature and therefore plays no part in arguments for the basic role of semantic contingency.

The efficacy of semantic contingency depends on a child exercising a lot of initiative, including asking a substantial number of questions. This aspect of interpersonal meanings has been extensively discussed. For example, Thomas' survey of parents shows that

> these early readers asked many prereading and during-reading questions, and thus it was difficult to ferret out who initiated the questioning process (Thomas, 1985: 472).

In a correlational study investigating 'parental style' of reading to young children and performance on prereading related tasks, Flood (1977) found that the number of questions asked by the child was one of six major factors which correlated significantly with positive performance. Other factors were the total number of words spoken by the child, the number of questions answered by the child, warm-up preparatory questions asked by the parents, and positive reinforcement by the parents. From a longitudinal study of nine children, Yaden et al. (1989) report that children asked a range of between two and fifteen questions per reading session of approximately twenty minutes.

Snow further suggests that caregivers have a more directly contributory role, in 'scaffolding' children's successful completion of tasks. The term 'scaffolding' signifies caregivers' activity in simplifying, appropriately organising tasks and providing relevant information to enable children eventually to succeed with them independently. An example is the use of specific questions to help a child recall and link relevant information to answer a more abstract question. Cochran-Smith provides evidence that caregivers often rephrase object texts to increase the accessibility of the language (Cochran-Smith, 1984:178).

Contrary to Snow's earlier comments on the inappropriateness of parent topic initiation, 'scaffolding' is often taken to mean the direct provision of relevant information by the caregiver (Cochran-Smith, 1984:192-3; Painter, 1986). There is some theoretical incoherence on this point in the

literature. From research descriptions of caregiver-child
interaction it is clear that direct provision of information
is a common 'scaffolding' practice. Viewed from one
perspective this is seen as positive. Viewed from another
perspective, that which strongly foregrounds the 'naturalness'
of children's learning and children as the originators of
their own learning, this same practice appears negative. Some
refinement of the semantic description of the practice, and
the contexts of its use in joint book-reading, is needed to
resolve the theoretical incoherence.

A third aspect of linguistic reciprocity is the caregiver's
activity in maintaining and developing realistic expectations
for a child, especially by moving the child forward into more
advanced literacy activity by refusing less mature forms of
behaviour (Altwerger et al., 1985; Bloome, 1985b; De Loache,
1984; Goodsitt and Raitan, 1988; Ninio and Bruner, 1978; Snow,
1983; Snow and Goldfield, 1983). Importantly, some variants
of the ways caregivers' read a child's knowledge and
competence have begun to be treated as indicators of pathology
in interaction (for example, Hiebert and Adams, 1987;
Scarborough, 1989).

Together with linguistic reciprocity, many writers observe the
importance of 'decontextualization' of language during
interaction. It is a difficult term to interpret in this
research literature, carrying as it does a wide range of
meanings, many of which are ambiguous and even contradictory.
No writer analyses substantial texts to exemplify
decontextualized language use in joint book-reading
interaction.

At the most simple level decontextualization refers to the use
of language beyond the 'here-and-now', that is use of
referents which are distant in time/space (Snow, 1983). In
joint book-reading research a commonly used linguistic
indicator of decontextualized speech is decreased use of
exophoric reference in children's speech, or variable use of

anaphoric reference in discussion of object text features and exophoric reference to associated features of the material context (Dombey, 1983). The very fact that children are read to from an object text means that language is in some sense 'decontextualized' since by definition it has a constitutive role in object texts (Halliday and Hasan, 1985).

Differential levels of abstraction in reference in joint book-reading in comparison with other common activities for children, such as modelling, is also argued to be an important feature of the activity (Sorsby and Martlew, 1991). However, there does not appear to have been any example of a grammatically based description of abstraction, such as analysis of the use of nominalisation, to explore this issue. Greater referential abstraction is most often exemplified specifically through discussion of metalinguistic reference (Olson and Torrance, 1987), which is held to be a common feature in joint book-reading (for example, Many, 1989; Yaden et al, 1989).

Early general experience in the use of decontextualized language in joint book-reading is said to have important effects in later schooling. For example, in considering causes of differential literacy achievement in the middle primary school amongst children from contrastive class backgrounds, Snow argues that familiarity with decontextualized language use may be the crucial factor. She comments, 'Perhaps most children are not failing at reading and writing but at comprehending and producing decontextualized information' (Snow, 1983:186).

Two senses of 'context' appear to be involved in children's development of literacy, by implication from this analysis. One sense involves recognition of a context as one requiring the production of certain meanings. The other involves recognition of relationships between contexts of initial learning and those in which decontextualized information *constructs* the context ('comprehension' of the relevance and

significance of decontextualized information). Snow's argument has a good deal of affinity on this point with studies of the ontogenesis of thought by Donaldson and her colleagues (Donaldson, 1978), which deconstruct the Piagetian notion of decentration as a general cognitive operation and assert the significant effect of the context in which problems are posed on children's 'ability' to solve them[4]. Both suggest the value of a non-individualistic approach to theorising the ontogenesis of abstract thought, though neither appear to have developed an account of relations between social formations, speakers' positions within them and contexts for meanings. The sense of 'context' from which meaning is 'decontextualized' and to which it is 'recontextualized' in Bernstein's (1990) sense is therefore problematic and requires analysis in this research field.

A related issue, concerning both decontextualization and patterns of language use, is the role of interactive routines in talk about object texts. Ninio and Bruner argued that specific talk routines assist a very young child to develop labelling because of their predictability. Subsequently other writers have exemplified the importance of routines in talk about books in supporting other features of oral language development (Snow, 1983; Snow and Goldfield, 1982). There is, though, a considerable theoretical problem created by an insufficient differentiation of the general phenomenon of routinisation in joint book-reading to be able to describe effectively what kinds of routines, and for what purposes, support what kinds of literacy development in children. The differentiation of types of context for talk about object texts seems, once again, crucial.

Another widely-discussed feature of caregiver's discourse is the use of 'text-to-life' and 'life-to-text' moves. The key

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4   A more discursively oriented theory of the effects of 'context' on children's learning, which explicitly critiques both Piaget's and Donaldson's views using Foucault's concept of discursive formation, was advanced by Walkerdine (1982, 1984). Space limitations preclude a detailed consideration of it here, but in all points specifically relevant to this study her critique is consistent with the theoretical perspective of coding orientation introduced in Chapter Eight.

feature is the 'application' of object text information to real-life settings, the building of relations between fictive and personal experience (De Loache, 1984; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Goldfield and Snow, 1984). The feature is an important aspect of the second sense of context discussed above, the means through which children build relationships between contexts of initial learning and decontextualized representations of related meanings. Cochran-Smith, using caregiver-child interaction in a nursery school, found 'text-to-life' moves to be a prominent feature of discourse and argued that they were

> aimed at helping the children compare, extend, or relate textual information to matters outside texts. In other words, Text-to-Life interactions focussed on helping the children apply a book's information, meaning, message, topic, problem, or theme to their lives (Cochran-Smith, 1984:236).

Such moves by caregivers form part of a more general pattern of intertextual relations in discourse. Not only are relationships built between specific object texts and the oral texts of everyday conversation but also within a range of familiar object texts, so that some preschool children learn very readily to make allusions to other object texts when reading. Interestingly, the findings have now begun to make a direct impact on pedagogy in the form of strategies for building up children's use of intertextual knowledge (Cairney, 1992).

From these diverse studies what is crucial for this research is the question of how scholars interpret the findings theoretically, particularly the specific issue of the role of adult language use in children's learning. It is Vygotsky's proposals which are the most commonly cited theoretical resource (eg, Cochran-Smith, 1984; Mason and Allen, 1986; Wells, with Bridges et al. 1981). At first sight this is somewhat surprising because, as the discussion in Section 2.3 attempted to demonstrate, 'emergent' is commonly taken to mean growth 'within' the child, with social contexts in the limited role of evoking stimuli. Nevertheless, Teale, whose promotion of the concept of emergent literacy was discussed in Section 2.3, nominates Vygotsky's work as 'a general theory for how

informal development of literacy proceeds' and further
comments that:

> Essentially, in becoming literate, children are internalizing the structure of
> activities that involve literacy which are conducted in the world around them ... In an
> important sense, the child's literacy environment does not have an independent
> existence; it is constructed in the interactions between children and the people around
> them ... (Teale, 1984:118).

There is a marked tendency in many accounts of emergent
literacy to use just some aspects of Vygotsky's theory, most
frequently the notion of the 'zone of proximal development'.
The selective use of the theory exacerbates the problem of
limited theorising of 'context'. It is almost as though
Vygotsky's work has been appropriated to existing research
paradigms, without the central tenets of Vygotsky's theory of
semiotic mediation affecting these paradigms.

A clear example of such a problem is to be found in Mason and
Allen's (1986) discussion of the question: how do children
become reflective language users? This example is apposite
because the research review from which it comes is deployed
widely in subsequent research literature. Mason and Allen
consider apparently conflicting answers to the question from
different theoretical perspectives. These were claims for
'natural learning', 'direct instruction' and 'learning from
cultural practices'. The analysis lead to the conclusion that

> in all likelihood, language awareness occurs through self-directed efforts, as Vygotsky
> and Halliday propose, as well as through deliberate instruction, as Olson suggests, and
> as part of the cultural milieu, as Heath points out (ibid., 9).

Social interactionist theory of learning becomes conceptually
'unhinged' from both explicit instruction and cultural
practice. At the centre of the discursive confusion lie terms
such as 'context', 'environment', 'natural' and 'informal'.

Vygotsky's theory of semiotic mediation *is* directly relevant
to analyses of literacy learning through joint book-reading
but for reasons beyond those typically discussed in this

literature. It is significant for this study to establish
explicitly what these theoretical resources are, and also to
problematise certain aspects of Vygotsky's theory in order to
develop an appropriate framework for an analysis of semiotic
mediation.

2.5   An excursus: Vygotskian theory

Vygotsky's two major works available in English are *Mind in
society* (1978) and *Thought and language* (1986). As well,
there are translations of some shorter papers (eg, 1981) and
the translations of major works by his student and
collaborator, Luria (1976, 1978, 1979). However, because so
much material is available only in Russian it is necessary to
rely on interpretations and discussions by scholars such as
Cole (1985), Lee (1985), Kozulin (1990), Rommetveit (1985) and
Wertsch (1985a, 1985b, 1985c; 1991).

Vygotsky made a primary distinction between natural and
sociocultural learning. By natural learning he meant learning
which results from biological changes in the individual, and
he opposed psychological theories which attempted to explain
all learning in these terms, either through 'biological
reductionism' or 'mechanistic behaviourism' (Wertsch,
1985c:20). He equally opposed educational theory which
assumed learning as the natural unfolding of the potential of
the individual. For example, in a sympathetic discussion of
Tolstoy's work, particularly his sensitivity to the role of
language in learning, he nevertheless comments that:

> ... Tolstoy is wrong when he suggests abandoning any attempt to direct the acquisition
> of concepts and calls for natural unhindered development. Suggesting this, he divorces
> the process of development from that of learning and instruction, particularly because
> his formulation is so categorical (Vygotsky, 1986:151).

He did not, though, dismiss the importance of physiological
maturation in children's learning, since he considered
biological functions to be the basis for all learning.
However, in his theory the emergence of higher mental
functions is the result not of biological maturation alone,

but of complex interaction between this form of development and social interaction. Kohlberg and Wertsch have coined the useful phrase 'emergent interactionism' to indicate the dynamic relationship between physiological maturation and social interaction in the development of an individual child.

> According to this position the explanatory principles that account for development must be *derived* from those that apply to the two separate forces of development, but they cannot be *reduced* to the principles that apply to either in isolation (Wertsch, 1985c:43).

A distinction between 'natural' and 'cultural' learning is central to an account of the development of higher mental functions. Of these, Vygotsky was immediately concerned with voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts and the development of volition (Vygotsky, 1981:163). The four criteria by which he distinguished between elementary and higher mental functions were, according to Wertsch:

> (1) the shift of control from the environment to the individual, that is, the emergence of voluntary regulation;
> (2) the emergence of conscious realization of mental processes;
> (3) the social nature and social origins of higher mental functions; and,
> (4) the use of signs to mediate higher mental functions (Wertsch, 1985c:25).

Within the category of higher mental functions Vygotsky also distinguished between 'rudimentary' and 'higher' forms of development (Wertsch, 1985c:31). Rudimentary forms are in a continuous line of development with higher forms, unlike elementary forms which are qualitatively different. Rudimentary forms are distinguished only by the mediational means implicated in the use of the forms.

The development of higher mental functions necessarily requires the use of sign mediation, particularly linguistic sign mediation, and signs are (usually) social constructs. Therefore, higher mental functioning is necessarily the result of social interaction in and through signs.

> The word's first function is its social function; and if we want to trace how it functions in the behaviour of an individual, we must consider how it used to function in social behaviour (Vygotsky, 1981:158).

Again, in this case specifically with reference to volition, he wrote:

> Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. Hence, one of the basic principles of volition is that of the division of functions among people, the new division into two parts of what is now combined into one. It is the development of a higher mental process in the drama that takes place among people. Therefore, the sociogenesis of higher forms of behaviour is the basic goal toward which the child's cultural development leads us (ibid., 163).

Vygotsky's evidence for his claims came from two major sources, both of which were the result of 'genetic' or developmental study of the evolution of the use of physical and psychological tools. For Vygotsky the concept of evolution was relevant not only to phylogeny but also to ontogeny. One source of evidence was comparative cultural study of the development of phenomena such as logical memory and scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1986:128ff), and the other was studies of ontogenetic development of higher mental functions, particularly in children from approximately three to twelve years. He considered that the origins of mature mental functioning are traceable through analysis of the forms of behaviour which come to constitute them, though not simply reducible to the individual elements of those forms as though they could be treated as in an additive relationship with each other. (On this distinction, see Vygotsky, 1986:4-5).

In fact, the two sources of evidence are only partially discrete since they both exemplify different aspects of the one phenomenon. The centrality of both tools and signs in the evolution of higher mental functions is succinctly stated in a comment by Vygotsky and Luria.

> The use and "invention" of tools in humanlike apes crowns the organic development of behaviour in evolution and paves the way for the transition of all development to take place along new paths. It creates *the basic psychological prerequisites for the historical development of behaviour*. Labour and the associated development of human speech and other psychological signs with which primitives attempt to master their behaviour, signify the beginning of genuine cultural or historical development of behaviour. Finally, in child development, along with processes of organic growth and maturation, a second line of development is clearly distinguished - the cultural growth of behaviour. It is based on the mastery of devices and means of cultural behaviour and thinking (Vygotsky and Luria, directly translated quotation in Wertsch, 1985c:22-23).

Further examination of evidence from the evolution of human culture, though fascinating, is not pursued here since it would involve considering not only the evidence itself but also addressing accusations made during the early Stalinist era that Vygotsky and Luria maintained an elitist approach to human culture. In brief, Vygotsky gives the following simple example to illustrate the general argument of the effect of tool/sign mediation in human evolution.

> Even such comparatively simple operations as tying a knot or marking a stick as a reminder change the psychological structure of the memory process. They extend the operation of the memory beyond the biological dimensions of the human nervous system and permit it to incorporate artificial, or self-generated, stimuli, which we call *signs*. This merger, unique to human beings, signifies an entirely new form of behaviour. The essential difference between it and the elementary functions is to be found in the functions of the stimulus-response relations of each. The central characteristic of elementary functions is that they are totally and directly determined by stimulation from the environment. For higher functions, the central feature is self-governed stimulation, that is, the creation and use of artificial stimuli which become the immediate causes of behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978:39).

(For comment on Vygotsky's foreshadowing of later twentieth century theories of exo-somatic evolution, see Hasan, 1992b.)

The second, and major, set of evidence was from studies of young children. Since the development of voluntary attention has been of particular interest to the emergent literacy field, as in Ninio and Bruner's (1978) study, it will be used as the specific example in the following discussion. Even a brief analysis of Vygotsky's research into the development of voluntary attention will show why the concept of the zone of proximal development is insufficient *in itself* to theorize literacy learning through joint book-reading.

Voluntary attention is regarded as crucial to the development of 'full' or 'scientific' concepts. Vygotsky defined the development of voluntary attention as

> evolution and change in the means for directing and carrying out attentional processes, the mastery of these processes, and their subordination to human control (Vygotsky, 1981:194).

He accorded it, together with logical memory, a particular
status in his account of development:

> The central issue of development during school age is the transition from primitive
> remembering and involuntary attention to the higher mental processes of voluntary
> attention and logical memory. Attention, previously involuntary, becomes increasingly
> dependent on the child's own thinking; mechanical memory changes to logical memory
> guided by meaning, and can now be deliberately used by the child (Vygotsky, 1986:166).

His studies of the ontogenesis of voluntary attention suggest
precisely how it is that social signs *initially* become the
means for internal regulation of attention, logical memory,
and forms of abstraction. In other words, how social signs
become the means with which to think.

In the process of interaction caregivers indicate to children
what aspects of the vast range of possible phenomena in a
particular type of situation they should attend to. In doing
so they show the child, however unconsciously, orders of
relevance of meanings for the use of language in some
environment (Bernstein, 1990). Halliday's evocative term is
that the child learns 'how to mean' (Halliday, 1975).

Taking the example of the mother in Ninio and Bruner's study
again for a moment, it is possible to see that she is doing
far more than just effectively teaching lexical labels or
protoconversational forms. Through what she and the child
jointly attend to with the help of verbal signs the child
learns to select, abstract, and generalise meanings, and
eventually to develop an orientation to particular literate
practices in and through joint book-reading. To put the point
somewhat aphoristically, interactive language is a resource
not only for meaning but also for learning (Halliday, 1975;
1993). Direction of the child's attention through the
language of interaction becomes one of the primary resources,
from the perspective of ontogenesis, for the development of an
understanding of ways of meaning (Hasan, 1984b).

In Vygotsky's theory 'words' have the primary function of
directing attention but he is also clear in maintaining that

it is language in social interaction which is the major means through which higher mental functioning develops. This is a very important point because it establishes that it is the semiotic resource of language in use, language exchanged by socially situated speakers rather than language per se, which is the mediational means for the development of higher mental functions.

Vygotsky's most famous formulation of his general position on learning through interaction was:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between two people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition (Vygotsky, 1981:163).

Since this statement has been used so extensively by researchers in the emergent literacy field it is important to underscore some specific features of the claim. Vygotsky does not argue here merely that social interaction is important for children's development. Rather, his position is that there is an *inherent* link between forms of social interaction and forms of higher mental functioning in children. In commenting on this issue Wertsch argues:

> In certain instances he saw an isomorphism between the organisation of processes on the two planes, and in all cases he argued that the form of interpsychological functioning has a powerful impact on the resulting form of intrapsychological functioning (Wertsch, 1985c:61).

The link between social interaction and higher psychological functioning is inherent because of the *specific mediational role of language*. This is a precise point about which there is some interpretive uncertainty in the emergent literacy research literature. The term 'interaction' sometimes is used as a general gloss, disassociated from the materiality of sign use and without explanatory power for the examination of the ontogenesis of multiplicities of literacies. For Vygotsky, social interaction is the crucial resource for the development of thought. However, the reason for its status is the point

of controversy. For Vygotsky, social interaction has this status because it makes available to the child intellectual resources through *semiosis in interaction*. The details of material practices in sign usage are therefore of critical importance.

If social semiosis through language in use in everyday talk is one major source of children's literacy learning an entailed question is: how do specific features of talk structure higher mental functioning beyond the specific, local situation of their use? Though Vygotsky's experiments on voluntary attention provide some hints towards an answer this evidence is not really sufficient to support the larger claim for the centrality of semiotic mediation, at least beyond the highly controlled settings which he devised to consider the very beginnings of sign mediation. The problem, consequently, is to understand how abilities to attend voluntarily, to think abstractly, to generalize, and to reflect on one's own conscious processes are developed through language in use.

The key Vygotskian concept through which this problem is addressed is the decontextualization of mediational means. The concept is defined by Wertsch as:

> ... the process whereby the meaning of signs become less and less dependent on the unique spatiotemporal context in which they are used (Wertsch, 1985c:33).

A phenomenon often used to exemplify this concept is children's development of abilities to calculate. At first their abilities are heavily dependent on specific, concrete representations of number, for example, but gradually children become able to abstract the numerical properties from their concrete representation and to operate on the abstract properties themselves. The mediational means are no longer features of the specific, local situation but aspects of general systems of thought. Another example is to be found in the age trends in Vygotsky's 'forbidden colours' game. Adolescents' ability to play the game successfully without the colour cards is explained in terms of their ability to operate

without the concrete representation of the mediational means,
that is with language rather than the cards as the symbolic
representation of the colours.

These are simple illustrations of a phenomenon which becomes
very much more complex when everyday talk becomes the
mediational means under focus. To put the problem in terms in
which it is discussed by Wertsch: what are the principles of
language in use which produce 'the decontextualization of
mediational means' (Wertsch, 1985c:217ff)?

To address this question it is necessary to engage in a short
analysis of Vygotsky's concept of word meaning, which itself
first involves recalling his work on the ontogenesis of full
'scientific' concepts.

Vygotsky described a series of phases in children's conceptual
development. The phases were characterised by such formations
as heaps (in which there appeared to be no principle of
organisation or selection), through various forms of complex
(for example, in which a child might begin to sort with a
specific attribute, but move to use a second attribute because
it was a coincidental feature of the first selection), to
pseudoconcepts and finally to full concept formation.

The important distinguishing feature of a pseudoconcept was
that, though in sorting blocks a child appeared to maintain
criteria consistently, when the use of the criteria was probed
the child was unable to maintain them, or to use the
implications of conflicting evidence. Pseudoconcepts, though
a necessary phase of development, are qualitatively different
because

> In the dialogue between child and adult ... both of them may refer to the same object,
> but each will think of it in a fundamentally different framework. The child's
> framework is purely situational, with the word tied to something concrete, whereas the
> adult's framework is conceptual (Vygotsky, 1986:133).

The analytic unit which Vygotsky saw as the key to the
evolution of concepts was 'word meaning'. For example, he

commented in the introductory pages of *Thought and language* that

> Psychology, which aims at a study of complex wholistic systems, must replace the method of analysis into elements with the method of analysis into units. What is the unit of verbal thought that is further unanalyzable and yet retains the properties of the whole? We believe that such a unit can be found in the internal aspect of the word, in *word meaning* (ibid., 5).

His orientation is again evolutionary, emphasising that word meanings evolve for the individual child. And this he considered crucial because

> The discovery that word meanings evolve [for individual children (GW)] leads the study of thought and speech out of a blind alley. Word meanings are dynamic rather than static formations. They change as the child develops; they change also with the various ways in which thought functions (ibid., 217).

Again, he stresses that

> The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them (ibid., 218).

The interesting theoretical and empirical problem is how to describe the features of natural settings which cause this dynamic evolutionary process. Vygotsky's own direct answer is that it is instructional discourse, particularly instructional discourse in schools, which creates the conditions for word meanings to evolve. This is, again, an issue which is material to the concerns of this study. I will first outline relevant aspects of Vygotsky's argument before turning to a critique of it, together with certain other aspects of his theory.

From the familiar point that there are basic qualitative differences between the early conceptual development of children and the full conceptual development of adults, he argued against the commonsense view that children's development proceeds additively through incremental gains and, alternatively, asserted that

> ... our data warrant the assumption that from the very beginning, the child's
> scientific and his spontaneous concepts ... *develop in reverse directions*: Starting
> far apart they move to meet each other (ibid., 192).

Writing about the ontogenesis of higher mental functions he states

> ... *the development of the child's spontaneous concepts proceeds upward, and the*
> *development of his scientific concepts downward*, to a more elementary and concrete
> level. This is a consequence of the different ways in which the two kinds of concepts
> emerge (Vygotsky, 1981:193, original emphasis).

Word meaning used in instructional discourse, he considered, created the 'pre-ordained pathway' through which children's thinking moved from its origins in heaps and complexes through pseudoconcepts to full 'scientific conceptual development'.

There are two specific features of instructional discourse which he argued to be central, and which are also directly relevant to consideration of children's literacy development. One feature is the *range and type of settings* across which word meanings are used. A critical feature of instructional discourse is that it extends the range of use of terms. The other feature is the *metasemiotic quality* of instructional discourse, particularly one highly specific aspect of this quality, uses of metalanguage in instructional discourse. For example, Vygotsky was interested in the cognitive effects of learning to write and learning grammatical description in schools. On the former, he commented on the cognitive effects of the fundamentally abstract, analytic quality of writing (contra the simple assumption that writing is 'speech written down', Vygotsky, 1986:180-1). On the latter, while recognising that grammar was not self-evidently of 'practical use', he nevertheless claimed that the learning of grammar contributed to children becoming more self-aware about language use (ibid., 184).

Vygotsky's work obviously makes a huge contribution to understanding how higher mental functions evolve, and how they are related to the social 'environment' of the child's learning. However, it is not the case that Vygotsky's theory

can be used directly, without further clarification and elaboration, in analyses of young children's literacy learning. For a socio-semantic study such as this one, there are three important difficulties with the theory as it currently stands. They are indicated briefly in the following section, and their resolution is the focus of extensive discussion in Chapters Three and Four.

2.6   Some key difficulties with Vygotsky's theory

Perhaps the most obvious and widely discussed problem is that, though Vygotsky considered language in use to be centrally implicated in the development of higher mental functions, his actual methods and to a large extent his explanations were cast in terms of word meanings. For Wertsch, as for several other analysts,

> ... Vygotsky's account of word meaning is not a good unit for analyzing the development of human consciousness. It does not provide the theoretical mechanisms needed to understand how the natural and social lines of development enter into emergent interactionism (Wertsch, 1985c:198).

This is particularly because, in Wertsch's view, word meaning is not in itself 'a microcosm or cell of human consciousness' but rather it is 'a unit of the *semiotic mediation* of consciousness' (ibid., 198).

What Vygotsky might have meant by word meaning is not a simple issue, but nevertheless his work did not provide an account of how word meanings relate to other strata in the linguistic system, nor of how these other strata might be implicated in semiotic mediation. At its most general this is a problem of an underdeveloped theory of language, since without a theory of language word is a meaningless concept, however transparent its commonsense use may make it appear.

Recognising the difficulty with 'word meaning', some researchers have focussed attention on the development of discourse referentiality (Hickman, 1987), which has largely meant a consideration of developmental changes in phoric

reference in children's oral explanations and narrative writing. Though the research is an important move beyond the investigation of 'word meaning' it does not overcome the central difficulty of the lack of a comprehensive theory of language through which to model semiotic mediation.

A further major difficulty is Vygotsky's endorsement of instructional discourse in school as if it were a quite unproblematic concept. The strong impression one gains in reading the later chapters of *Thought and language*, and at many points in *Mind in society*, is that school instructional discourse is a unitary phenomenon so far as language use is concerned. Instructional discourse is certainly considered to be dysfunctional if it is inappropriate to a child's zone of proximal development, but otherwise its most important general characteristic is that

> the linguistic milieu, with its stable permanent word meanings, charts the way that the child's generalizations will take. But, constrained as it is, the child's thinking proceeds along this preordained path in the manner characteristic of the child's own stage of intellectual development. Adults, through their verbal communication with the child, are able to predetermine the path of the development of generalizations and its final point - a fully formed concept (Vygotsky, 1986:120).

For explanations of differential outcomes from schooling, even after the first two or three years, the only available argument is the rather individualistic one that teachers have not appropriately arranged instruction in the zone of proximal development. What is needed is a much fuller account of possible relationships between learning through everyday talk in the home and instructional discourses in school settings.

These are important but familiar difficulties, at least in a general form. However, recently some different questions about qualities of everyday discourse as semiotic mediation have been raised by scholars in a variety of disciplines, for example Denny (1991), Goody (1987) and Hasan (1992b). Since Hasan's work is directly concerned with problems of socio-semantic variation I will use it as a point of departure.

Hasan begins her critique from a review of the well-known research by Luria and Vygotsky amongst the Uzbekhi, in which adult subjects who had never attended school and who were illiterate found great difficulty in categorising items on abstract criteria. They also experienced difficulty in answering questions using the terms of syllogisms.

Hasan's questions are about the nature of the verbal semiosis which produces syllogistic reasoning, abstraction and generalization. To say, as is implied in Vygotsky and Luria's work, that verbal semiosis is centrally implicated in the development of human consciousness is to give too general a description of semiotic mediation. Since these were adult, competent language users their difficulty with categorisation and syllogistic reasoning obviously cannot be explained by a general failure of participation in verbal semiosis. Thus,

> ... verbal semiosis may be a necessary condition for the development of such functions, but it is not just any kind of verbal semiosis that will necessarily lead to their emergence (Hasan, 1992b:497).

One possible reply to Hasan's critique here may be that the Uzbekhi's difficulties with Luria's categorisation questions are an indication of pseudo-conceptual thinking, resulting from the inaccessibility of instructional discourse in formal schooling. These subjects, it might be argued, obviously use higher mental functions but aspects of their thinking are transitional between complexes and full concepts. (For example, see on this point Vygotsky's own comments on Levy-Bruhl's work amongst the Bororo of Brazil; Vygotsky, 1986:128ff.) A related argument might be that the functions themselves are to be regarded as what Vygotsky called 'rudimentary': that is, they are higher mental functions, but not a developed form of those functions.

However, this is clearly an untenable view because Luria's selection of items, and the terms of the syllogism, involved familiar references for the Uzbekhi subjects. If they were asked about the characteristics of bears in distant places,

their difficulties with syllogisms cannot be attributed to
preconceptual thinking about bears themselves. There is no
indication in the protocols quoted by Luria that these
subjects were unable to use the selected terms as symbols
rather than simply signals (Hasan, 1992b:501). If their
thinking is not 'preconceptual', the functions cannot be
regarded as 'rudimentary'.

If the higher mental functions of both the Uzbekhis and the
researchers involve semiotic mediation and are not the outcome
of 'natural' development, the forms of thought in the two
groups cannot be attributed to semiotic mediation *itself* but
must be attributable to 'particular forms of semiotic
mediation', which is therefore to be understood as a variable
phenomenon. Hasan suggests that this consequence of variation
itself raises two further questions:

> one, how should that particular variety of semiotic mediation be characterised which
> underlies the genesis of abstract categorical thinking - what are the internal
> linguistic attributes of such semiotic mediation?, and
>
> two, what, if any, is the relation between the material conditions of social existence
> and variant forms of semiotic mediation, in other words, what underlies the appearance
> of the internal linguistic attributes that characterize the variant forms of semiotic
> mediation? (ibid., 499).

She further points out that it is not possible to explain the
results of Luria's questioning through the proposition that
the Uzbekhis were unable to manage decontextualized word
meanings, given that they were adult speakers of the language
and therefore necessarily used decontextualized word meanings
in the living of life. Rather,

> the 'process of reflecting on decontextualized meanings' has to be seen as *a specific
> kind of social process*, a particular kind of language use (ibid., 502, original
> emphasis).

This kind of social process is not inherently demanded in all
uses of the linguistic system, but is 'a function of the
social situatedness of the varieties of verbal interaction'.
Some theory of social context, which enables a description of

relations between specific kinds of social processes and specific types of social formations, is therefore required.

There is some interesting evidence to support Hasan's theoretical argument in Goody's (1987) reconsideration of the famous study of Vai literacy by Scribner and Cole (1981). These writers had reported that logical reasoning was unaffected by the acquisition of literacy in Vai script as measured by a series of psychological tests. Key elements of Goody's argument can be represented briefly by reference to findings from a case study he conducted with Cole and Scribner (Goody, with Cole and Scribner, 1987).

The case study involved detailed scrutiny of the notebooks and account ledgers written in Vai script by a leader of a religious association, Sonie, in Liberia during 1926-1959. In this material, obviously an example of literacy in everyday use, Goody, Cole and Scribner found clear evidence that the literacy practices were associated with specific forms of abstract, logical reasoning. It represents very different evidence about the consequences of literacy practices in Vai from those which Scribner and Cole (1981) had reached on the basis of the psychological tests.

Sonie's case illustrates how necessary it is to use methodologies which consider the development of forms of consciousness in naturally occurring contexts (Goody, with Cole and Scribner, 1987:206-7). As with the cultural effects of variable literacy practices, the problem of investigating the ontogenesis of literacy is necessarily a question of the social situatedness of persons, their access to, and uses of, various forms of discourse, and the relationships between these uses and the social formations in which they occur.

In the emergent literacy field correlations between the social situatedness of persons and forms of linguistic interaction have been examined by some previous writers. Their work is important for this study not only for the specific findings

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about variation, but also because some account of context, and variation between contexts, is logically required by any research which contemplates systematic meaning variation. Given the difficulties about this concept which have been demonstrated through analysis of joint book-reading studies in Section 2.4, and now in Vygotskian theory in relation to variable semiotic mediation, how these scholars theorized context is crucial background for the selection of a research approach in this study.

2.7   Variation in joint book-reading interaction

Variation in joint book-reading interaction has been, in a very general sense, a long-standing subject of research interest. Instance, for example, Carol Chomsky's (1972) examination of the effects of differences in socioeconomic status on joint book-reading and, consequently, the development of syntax. The interest has continued through to recent investigations of such issues as the practices of Black American and other minority group families in reading different genres of object text to children (Auerbach, 1989; Miller et al. 1986; Ninio, 1980; Pellegrini et al., 1990).

However, there are four studies of variation in linguistic interaction which directly implicate joint book-reading in their analyses, and which are prominently discussed in the emergent literacy literature. Two are somewhat smaller in scale, by Teale (1986) and Tizard and Hughes (1984). The other two, by Wells and his colleagues (eg, Wells, 1979; 1981; 1985a; 1985b; 1987b; Moon and Wells, 1979) and by Heath (1982b; 1983) are much larger. None is concerned exclusively with joint book-reading as a variable social practice, but in each it is regarded as an important factor influencing children's early literacy attainment.

2.7.1 Teale's analysis of relations between home background and young children's literacy development

Teale's study (1986), entitled 'Home background and young children's literacy development' was conducted in San Diego with 24 Anglo, Black and Mexican families of low-income. Children between the ages of 2.5 and 3.5 years were observed. Though reference is made to 'social structural' as distinct from 'cultural' factors, no explication of relationships between social class and income is advanced. There is some indication that a range of occupations, from unskilled to semi-skilled, were represented amongst the selected families (ibid., 190).

Teale found that there was substantial variation in uses of literacy, both in terms of 'participant structures' and 'domains of activity' within this low-income group. All families used some forms of literacy for some purposes, but both the general nature and the extent of literacy activities involving children varied quite dramatically.

Two factors in this wide-ranging ethnographic study are particularly pertinent to this project. First, only three of the 24 families read to the child regularly. However, within this very small amount of data, substantial variation could be observed in interactive practices. It is noted that the children who were read to regularly were 'among the most highly developed of 24 focal children in terms of emergent literacy abilities' (ibid., 196). Teale also found that there was very little literacy activity in the home 'associated with work', in the sense that 'almost no reading or writing associated with work "spilled over" into the home environment' (ibid., 190).

There are some important problems with Teale's formulation of the social background of his informants. First, an ambiguous conclusion is reached about the effects of low family income on literacy practices. On the one hand there is the observation that 'a factor such as income can have a dramatic

effect on the home literacy environment' (ibid., 193). On the
other hand Teale also argues that:

> the data clearly showed that economic circumstances need not in any way restrict the
> amount of richness of literacy experiences for preschool children. We observed
> instances of what other writers have described as "highly literate" homes among these
> low-income families (ibid., 193).

The final formulation appears to reduce complex questions of
relations between agents in social formations to choices by
individuals acting voluntarily to over-ride social
impediments. It is similar in this respect to Clark's
insistence on the significance of family valuing of education
for the precocious development of reading. The explanation
seems partly to arise as a consequence of the use of such an
indirect indicator of social structural relations as level of
family income. Second, the analysis of workplace and home
literacy practices does not examine *consistency* between work
and home literacy practices, as well as consistencies between
these two institutional sites in other aspects of language in
use. Third, no systematic linguistic examination of the
family interaction was possible because the data were in the
form of field-notes. This is an important methodological
limitation to the conclusions about effects of economic
circumstances advanced in the quotation above. What counts as
'the amount of richness of literacy experiences for preschool
children' is not transparent.

2.7.2   **Tizard and Hughes' study of everyday talk in the
               home between mothers and daughters**

Tizard and Hughes (1984) were interested in differences in
everyday talk in the home between 30 mothers and their four-
year-old daughters as a function of social class and, in turn,
differences between this data and talk between nursery school
teachers and children. The criteria used to determine the
social class categories were based on the British Registrar
General's classification of the social prestige of
occupations. Additionally, data on mothers' educational
backgrounds were included. All middle-class mothers had

either attended college or university, or had qualified to do so. In contrast, all working-class mothers had left school at the minimum age, with no public examination successes (ibid., 133, 138).

Attention will be confined specifically to findings about joint book-reading. As general background it can be said that important variation in everyday talk was observed, and that the authors attributed the variation to 'maternal styles' of speaking.

The data set contained only a small amount of talk from joint book-reading by the mother-daughter dyads, largely because recordings were made in homes for 2.5 hours during afternoons, rather than around bedtime. Less than a third of all mothers read stories, and this often appeared to be done more to calm children when they had become 'tired and fractious' than for other purposes.

Although the study was designed specifically to consider variation in everyday talk as a function of social class position, it is notable that the discussion of variation in interaction around books ('learning through stories', ibid., 59-68) is silent on this issue. Two samples of transcript are considered, one from a dyad in each class, but there is no indication that the interaction is representative.

Tizard and Hughes point out the role of shared attention to an object text in 'helping the child to clarify her ideas', to the frequency of children's questions, the frequency of their spontaneous comments, and to mothers' strategy in linking aspects of the story with the child's own experiences. But there is no information as to how these behaviours are distributed across dyads in the two class groups, nor on variation, or the lack thereof, in the configuration of the nominated features. This is an important difficulty, not least because the reader has no way of determining whether the joint book-reading episodes include many examples of what

Tizard and Hughes called 'passages of sustained intellectual search'. The point is particularly significant because these passages were considered to occur much more commonly in the middle-class sample of everyday talk.

2.7.3   Wells' Bristol study of language development

Wells' major study was concerned with language development during preschool years of a sample of 129 children, drawn from mother-tongue English language backgrounds across four classes of family background, defined in terms of parental occupation and education. Approximately equal numbers of male and female children were included (Wells, with Bridges et al. 1981:5). It is well-known that in his initial general study Wells, in contrast to Tizard and Hughes, found no general quantitative differences in oral language interaction in everyday talk in the home amongst preschool children. (The reasons for this difference are not difficult to determine, given the very different methods for sampling children's language, and the forms of measurement which were employed in the two studies.) What is of more immediate interest here is a follow-up study of the early educational achievements of 32 children from the original sample, biased towards the two extremes of the scale of family background[5] (Wells, with Bridges et al., 1981:11). Assessments of educational attainment at seven years were obtained through a range of standardised and specifically developed tests, and through interviews with parents and teachers.

In this data there was a very strong association between social class and educational attainment at seven years, on both the test scores and teacher assessments. There was also a strong association between social class and teacher assessment of children on entry to school. The finding with

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[5]   Wells also used the British Registrar-General's categorisation of occupational status, recoded on a five-point scale, plus a weighted measure of educational level (in four intervals from 'minimal' to 'more than minimal'). Total scores were then differentiated into four categories of Family Background.

respect to school achievement is, of course, consistent with results from a large number of other studies[6].

The home literacy background of the children was consistently the factor most strongly correlated with educational attainment in both the parent interview and test data. For the parent interview data this factor was indicated through measures of 'child interest in literacy', 'child concentration in literacy', 'number of books owned by the child', and 'parents' interest in literacy'. In the test data the 'knowledge of literacy', 'acting-out story comprehension' and 'questions on story comprehension' measures were by far the most strongly correlated with early attainment.

In turn, these were strongly correlated with class of family background. Wells concludes that:

> one important source of the class-associated differences that emerge in school-based assessments of attainment is the difference between homes in the value that is placed on literacy and in steps that parents take to transmit this value to their children (Wells, 1985a:94).

When these differences were themselves analysed by further scrutiny of the samples of language interaction collected before the children started school, the factor which was most strongly correlated with attainment at seven was 'listening to stories', even in contrast with measures of 'looking at a picture book and talking about it', 'drawing and colouring', and 'writing - or pretending to write' (Wells, 1987b:150). Frequency of 'reading stories' was strongly correlated with level of mothers' education and both parents' education combined (Wells 1985b:246).

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[6]   For example, though Tizard and Hughes did not themselves consider early school attainment for the girls in their study, a test of mathematical attainment was administered by Walkerdine and Lucey at ten years. The data show that attainment levels are very different between the two classes of family background, and that even when some of the girls were succeeding well in comparison with their classmates, the mean for the class itself was very different from the class means for the top middle-class girls (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989:190-1).

Though 'listening to stories' is globally described in the statistical analysis in this way, Wells points out that it is unlikely to be the reading of stories, per se, which is causally implicated in the differential attainment, though he does suggest that listening to stories is particularly a type of interaction which utilises 'decontextualized' language (see also Dombey, 1983). He suggests that:

> ... a great deal will depend on the sorts of stories that are read and on *the talk that accompanies or follows their reading* (Wells, 1985a:135, emphasis added).

However, because everyday talk in the home was sampled through a time-interval schedule, taking ninety-second intervals of interaction, it was not possible to consider qualitative features of talk associated with 'listening to stories' systematically. Wells, as did Tizard and Hughes, provides an excerpt of transcript to exemplify desirable features of a 'light' conversational touch.

> Conversation of this kind requires a light touch, a willingness to listen and to follow the child's lead, helping him to develop and clarify his own interpretation, rather than imposing one that is 'correct' - from an adult point of view (ibid., 139).

It was not possible, though, for him to describe the 'type' of talk considered to be causally implicated in early school attainment in a more linguistically specific way. It is an issue which has remained problematic in the field since this study. Wells also himself specifically commented on the impossibility of studying differences in coding orientations (Bernstein, 1990) represented by the categories of family background because the data 'do not permit a sufficiently close matching of contexts across children' (ibid., 92).

Given these limitations it is perhaps surprising to find a comment, in a later text addressed more specifically to teachers about the same data, that

> On the basis of the evidence we collected, therefore, there is no justification for continuing to hold the stereotyped belief that there are strongly class-associated differences in the ways in which parents talk with their children (Wells, 1987b:143).

The earlier discussion did seem to suggest some important
class-associated differences in ways parents talk with
children about written texts. Perhaps what is at issue here
is 'stereotyped belief', since different kinds of beliefs
about class differences in talk abound in the community.
Whatever the resolution of this uncertainty, the context of
talk about books clearly emerged as central to children's
successs in the early development of schooled literacy.

2.7.4   Heath's study of language use in three
               communities

Contexts of everyday talk about books are also significant in
Heath's ten-year ethnographic study of both literate and oral
cultural practices in three communities in the Piedmont region
of the United States. This is the most widely cited study of
variation in joint book-reading in the pedagogical literature.

Some pertinent background information will be provided first,
followed by an outline of apposite specific findings and then
a discussion of some problems in the theoretical basis for the
interpretation of variation. Aspects of this study will also
be further examined from an alternative theoretical
perspective in Chapter Eight, Section 8.7.

One of the communities is identified as 'mainstream' by the
participants themselves, who live in the regional centre,
Gateway. 'Mainstream' is used in the sense of 'maintown'
(Heath's term), and comprises families who:

> look beyond the Piedmont for rules and guidance in ways of dressing, entertaining
> themselves, decorating their homes, and decision-making in their jobs. Though for some
> of the old time families, their core values may be regional, many of their norms of
> conduct and bases for forming judgements about their own and others' behaviours have
> much in common with the national mainstream middle class generally presented in the
> public media as the American client or customer (Heath, 1983:236).

Importantly, the sense of 'maintown' here is not one of
geographical location, since there is no discussion of
variable practices amongst families living inside the

geographical boundaries of the regional centre[7]. In fact, data for this aspect of the study was gathered by Heath and on her behalf by teachers who were students in her courses in Anthropology and Language and Culture at the regional training institution (Heath, 1982b:52; 1983:391, Note 1). For the most part students recorded their own home literacy practices.

The other two communities were closely associated economically with the 'maintown' but were physically separate from it. Roadville was a white, working-class neighbourhood in close proximity to the cotton mill, which was the major employer of the residents' labour. Trackton was a black neighbourhood, with many of the residents dependent on welfare benefits. Those who were in the waged labour system were

> hourly workers, highly vulnerable to both fluctuations in the economy and seasonal changes which affect the availability of work (ibid., 53).

Heath found strong evidence of variation in 'storytime' reading practices within these three communities. In Trackton, the practice virtually did not exist at all, but in Roadville and Gateway it was extensive but very different.

In Roadville, there were three clearly defined, but overlapping, stages of interaction between mothers and children about print before school. In the first, mothers began reading simple books, such as alphabet books and texts with one labelled object per page, to children before they were six months old. Often during this first stage there was a close link with TV programmes, with texts reproducing characters from children's favourite programs, still with minimal language. In this earliest stage children were primarily required to provide labels for graphic representations, though

> some few formulaic questions move away from the text of the storybook itself and draw on the child's real-world knowledge or information learned in other contexts (ibid., 224).

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[7]   On the findings of this research with respect to class differences within Gateway, see Rosen (1985).

There was a marked change in joint book-reading at around three, consistent with practice in Sunday School. During this stage children had to learn to sit still and listen quietly for long periods of caregiver reading, usually from some form of narrative. Heath identifies the questions adults ask during this period as usually 'what-explanations' (ibid., 227). Children were allowed to ask questions at the end of the caregiver reading, but they were not permitted to interrupt during the reading. A pronounced 'struggle of wills' was noted during this period, as a consequence of the degree of change from the earlier, more boisterous interactive pattern.

As children approached school entry parents gave more emphasis to 'work-book' oriented activities, including colouring-in between boundaries, printing of letters, following numbers and so on. During this period there was an emphasis on orienting children to school through these activities by both adults and older children. All of these activities ceased when the children entered school, and generally

> the domains of school and home are kept separate once the child starts to school and certainly by the end of the primary years (ibid., 230).

In summary, it seems that the period immediately prior to school entry was characterised by increasingly specific regulation of children's interactive uses of literacy, in order to prepare them for what was assumed to be required by school pedagogy. In particular these involved children in sitting still, listening quietly, and answering questions specifically and with appropriate lexical material ('dog', not 'mutt' or 'hound dog'). Joint storyreading occasions were therefore marked off by very strong boundaries around appropriate forms of interaction at different phases of the child's preschool literacy experience[8].

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[8] The discussion here deliberately constructs a different sense of the nature of interaction around object texts in Roadville from that given by Mason and Allen's comment in their widely quoted review of emergent literacy research that 'there are not extensive parent-child literacy events' in Roadville (Mason and Allen, 1986:9).

Mother-child interaction amongst Gateway participants during joint book-reading was not strongly bounded. Rather, there was a sense of continuity between linguistic interaction in joint book-reading and other aspects of everyday talk. Heath comments, for example:

> The negotiation of jointly shared attention in communication between mother and child appears again and again in the numerous question and answer routines these mainstream mothers engage in with their infants. Formulaic exchanges in which mother asks a question, and child responds either verbally or nonverbally mark peek-a-boo games ..., responses to strange sounds ..., and book-reading activities. In all of these, the mother coaches the child to attend to a rule-governed event and to share in her way of responding to that event (ibid., 248).

Questions were the 'most frequent type of talk' addressed to children by mothers, and in joint book-reading they were again observed to be, from early in the child's life, a major feature of interaction. In contrast with Roadville children, the preschool Gateway children often asked questions during the reading of long stretches of narrative. These had a range of different functions. For example, Gateway children

> asked for clarification ... they initiated mock routines in which they "read" or asked questions of the adults about the pictures or story content, or they asked questions which related the book's content to other situations which were similar (ibid., 253).

They were much more overtly contributory in joint book-reading than the Roadville children.

Ways of talking about books in Gateway were found to be very similar to ways of talking about texts in school. Heath comments about Gateway children:

> By the time they enter school, they have had continuous experience as information-givers; they have learned how to perform in those interactions which surround literate sources throughout school. They have had years of practice in interaction situations that are the heart of reading - both learning to read and learning to learn in school. They have developed habits of performing which enable them to run through the hierarchy of preferred knowledge about a literate source and the appropriate sequence of skills to be displayed in showing knowledge of a subject. They have developed ways of decontextualizing and surrounding with explanatory prose the knowledge gained from selective attention to objects (Heath, 1982b:56).

The point is not that children learnt the applicability of some concepts they have read about to their lived experience

(that is something the Roadville children also learnt through practices associated with religious texts), but that they learnt a distinctive set of interpretive practices, particularly involving intertextuality.

This learning has far-reaching consequences because the practices were found to be not only homologous between home and school, but also between home and aspects of workplace uses of literacy by the fathers[9]. Perhaps the most important is that, as a result of the weak 'borders' between book-reading episodes and other occasions of everyday conversation, children learned to classify and construct knowledge by moving readily between information from texts they had read with their mothers and new information from various sources, in a type of running metacommentary on both 'lived' and 'read' experience. It seems that what may be critical here for the Gateway children's success are *specific processes of abstraction* in linguistic exchanges, though Heath herself does not consider the difference in this way[10] .

In her general observations of the uses of literacy in Gateway workplaces Heath noted that:

> ... on-the-job routines of using oral and written language follow patterns used with preschoolers in the homes of the townspeople. The mill executive talks with and from written materials, following habitual ways of taking meaning from written sources and linking and extending it to shared background experiences with conversationalists (Heath, 1983:261).

That is to say, precisely what in Roadville is excluded through the strongly bounded, localised quality of the reading situation is a crucial resource in positions of economic power, which the preschool children of Gateway learn to use as though naturally. Heath comments that such uses of language appear to be so natural to Gateway executives they

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[9]   No analysis of workplace uses of literacy by mothers is given, presumably because all of the Gateway informants were students and teachers in Heath's university courses.

[10] The theoretical analysis is developed rather in terms of styles of thinking, as between field-dependent and field-independent thinkers (Heath, 1982b:55).

despair that neither white nor black millworkers seem to find these ways of organising
and talking about transferring knowledge into action "natural" (ibid., 262).

This study is not merely a celebration of different literacy
practices, nor simply a criticism that only one of these sets
of practices is 'welcomed' in and by pedagogic discourse. The
study also points to important relationships between language
practices in the workplace and in the home as a result of
family positioning through the social division of labour.
However, because the text's foregrounded contrast is variation
between the linguistic practices of Roadville and Trackton, it
is almost always read in the emergent literacy literature as
only concerned with inter-cultural difference in literate
social practices.

Heath's ethnographic study is a considerable achievement. The
ethnographic descriptions are well-suited to the major
research task which Heath established, that of demonstrating
the impossibility of sustaining a simple bipolar division
between 'oral' and 'literate' sociocultural practices. There
are, however, certain difficulties which cannot be ignored.
For example, the linguistic descriptions are not sufficiently
systematic or descriptively delicate to enable a careful
consideration of the range of linguistic features which might
be implicated in the variation.

Three particular problems arise. First, the analysis of talk
in the families is largely built around the frequency of broad
types of questions, represented in general terms. These are,
for example, questions requiring a what-explanation, questions
for which the questioner already has the information,
unanswerable questions, and questions for which the addressee
has the information. It is unlikely that the observed
differences in language use, and associated variation in
literacy practices, can be accounted for by patterns of
questions alone, nor is it possible to interpret how
questions, and even answers to questions, configure with other
features of language. Heath herself seems to imply this in
her discussion of a transcript example of joint book-reading

talk in Roadville (Heath, 1982b:58-9). The issue of what other features of language play what kind of role, and in what configurations within the different social formations, is important. These questions cannot be addressed from the sample data.

Second, the delicacy of the analyses of language differs between the three sets of family sites, and between these and pedagogic discourse in school. Some degree of linguistic detail is provided only for the Gateway group. The different degrees of delicacy make precise comparison of the patterning of linguistic features impossible.

The third difficulty concerns relationships between home language practices and uses of literacy in the workplace. Assume for a moment that it were possible to give a very detailed description, from within an explicit linguistic theory, of patterns of linguistic features which effectively differentiate the three sets of language practices in families. What would follow from this? Heath argues cogently that one set is associated with power in the workplace, but the further question is: *why* is this the case? In other words, there is an important theoretical gap in explicating the significance of variation because the discussion is constrained largely to 'traditions' within local communities.

In summary, the difficulties require the use of a more systematic and robust linguistic theory, coherently related to a social theory which predicts differential use of language as a function of the division of labour, in the further exploration of home-school relations in joint book-reading. These are significant research difficulties to be overcome and will be considered in more detail in Chapters Three and Four.

2.8 Uses of joint book-reading research in the discourse of literacy pedagogy

The final movement in this introductory discussion is to exemplify how texts in the discourse of literacy pedagogy construct images of variation in joint book-reading. The type of text which is the particular focus of attention is that which teachers use as handbooks or reference material for classroom practice. Processes of elision and glossing of variation in joint book-reading will be exemplified through a brief discussion of two major texts. Subsequently, a text which does explicitly attempt to represent the significance of variation in children's literacy experiences to teachers for their planning and interaction will be critiqued.

The first pedagogic text, Holdaway's *The foundations of literacy*, has been internationally influential for pedagogy since its publication in 1979 (see, for example, Cambourne, 1990). Clearly *The foundations of literacy* predates much of the specific research on variation in home reading practices discussed above, though not the broader debates on language variation in education prominent in the 1970's. It is selected for discussion because of the extent of influence it has achieved, and also as a benchmark statement of pedagogic 'attitudes' to language variation at the beginning of the upsurge of interest in emergent literacy in 1980. To illustrate the first point, Cambourne (1988, 1990) seems very close to Holdaway's position about the value of 'immersion', 'approximation', 'lively examples of the skill in action', and also in such general statements as:

> ... there is a wealth of evidence ... indicating that literacy skills develop in the same 'natural' way as spoken language when the conditions for learning are comparable (Holdaway, 1979:20).

There is a direct line in the pedagogic literature extending from *The foundations of literacy* to a set of other very influential pedagogic handbooks.

The second text, *Emerging literacy: Young children learn to read and write* (Strickland and Morrow, 1989a); is selected as

a more recent publication on emergent literacy and pedagogy by the International Reading Association. It might therefore reasonably be expected to take account of research on variation in social practices in the emergent literacy field.

In *The foundations of literacy*, several competing theories of instruction are employed as though they represent a consistent position. For example, there is a movement between behaviourist concepts such as 'contingent reinforcement' and a theory of natural language learning, based implicitly on Chomsky's theory of language acquisition. One of the effects is to reduce 'context' to the sense of what evokes desired behaviour - a necessary condition for the unfolding of emergent behaviours which are at some deep level of the child's mind. Thus Holdaway argues:

> Linguistically, the [preschool] children are operating at a level of deep semantic processing, they are manipulating their own syntax in relationship to the deep syntactical structure of the text, and they are sorting out possibilities, striving to maintain grammatical agreement while experimenting with complex transformations. They are learning how to throw a syntactic rope across the abyss of meaning before they shuttle vocabulary over to the other side - a sort of flying-fox strategy of encoding (Holdaway, 1979:52).

As further evidence of the treatment of context, consider that differences between spoken and written language are discussed in terms of the child learning 'context-free' operations through hearing written language read aloud (ibid., 54).

It is not surprising, then, to read that class differences in language practices are not important.

> Many parents in our culture read to their preschool children regularly and provide them liberally with books and with the materials for writing. There may be a tendency for this custom to be associated with the middle-class, but for our purposes this is probably not an important consideration (Holdaway, 1979:39; see also 'literacy is a cultural matter' (ibid., 17).

From this perspective it is then possible for a universalist position on home reading practices to be advanced. In fact, a strong contrast is drawn between 'developmental learning' and 'school learning', in which the importance of the

instructional role of adults in 'developmental' learning is minimised. Developmental learning is

> the type of learning engaged in by infants before they enter school and by school children outside the instructional environment ... it is short on teaching and long on learning; it is self-regulated rather than adult-regulated; it goes hand in hand with the fulfilment of real-life purposes; it emulates the behaviour of people who model the skill in natural use (ibid., 14-5).

The International Reading Association text, *Emerging literacy*, is an edited work in which various articles recontextualize research texts differently. Two articles are of particular relevance to this discussion, 'Family storybook reading: Implications for children, families, and curriculum' (Strickland and Taylor, 1989) and 'Reading to Kindergarten children' (Mason, Peterman and Kerr, 1989).

Both articles claim to be based on research texts, explicitly including some of the studies noted earlier in this chapter, and explicitly arguing that school pedagogy can be based on family reading practices. For example, Strickland and Taylor state that:

> Caregivers and classroom teachers can use what has been learned about the dynamics of family storybook reading to plan for and analyze shared book experiences in their classrooms (Strickland and Taylor, 1989:31).

They state five (general) conditions under which first language learning occurs: an atmosphere of success; an atmosphere that is largely child-centered; a meaningful context; presentation of the whole system of what is to be learned; and (to quote their last point directly),

> it is important to note that none of these features inherently requires standard forms. What is required is adult-child interaction where the focus is on whole language used in a meaningful context (ibid., 27-8).

The last point is crucial because it exemplifies how complex research on linguistic variation is reduced in pedagogic texts to a comment on dialectal variation, directly excluding the possibility of semantic variation as a function of speakers' location in social formations and its educational

consequences. Given the extent to which texts such as *Ways with words* have penetrated educational discussion, this is quite a significant reduction. Even what is known of Roadville children's home reading practices might lead educators to suspect the general applicability of a comment such as the following about a teacher's desirable practice:

> Whenever possible, Joyce interviews two or three children after a read aloud session in order to personalise their responses. Telling them that she is very interested in what *they* think, she uses a pad and pencil to take notes during their brief one-to-one conversations. When the children see her writing, they know she genuinely cares (ibid., 32).

Biological metaphors of conditions for natural growth are prominent, forming the basis for universals, such as the comment that 'For Marie-Ellen, storybook reading is almost an extension of breast-feeding her little girl' (ibid., 31).

The chapter by Mason et al., 'Reading to kindergarten children', is in a more complex relationship with the home reading research texts. While this research is used as the basis for raising questions about desirable school pedagogic practice, the article is simultaneously a report of observations of the practices of six 'experienced' kindergarten teachers and a detailed specification of good practice in relation to three different types of text. However, it is interesting that there is again the specific claim that

> teachers read stories in much the same way parents read to their children at home, with comments and questions that led children to comment and answer and ask questions about the story (Mason et al., 1989:56).

Questions and answers are not only for the exchange of information in classrooms but also for display of this information by pedagogic subjects. So the question arises: what kind of information is it relevant for children to display through which teachers can read their developing competence? Mason et al. write that these experienced teachers 'asked comprehension questions to check for understanding'(ibid., 56). They formulate a table of

guidelines for teachers based on the observations of these
teachers' practices, giving three specific instructional
principles: ask questions occasionally to monitor children's
comprehension of the story'; 'at appropriate points, ask
children to predict what might happen next'; and 'allow
children to voice their own interpretations of the story'
(ibid., 57). It is a selection of specific practices from
within a particular social formation which is promoted,
without recognition of the interpretive complexity this
selection involves for some pedagogic subjects.

The critique of these two specific texts is not presented with
the implication that they represent just a local problem of
accuracy or completeness in scholarship. Rather, it is to
suggest that there are important structural relationships at
stake between the production of research about family literacy
practices, including the initial selection of research sites
in social formations; selection from, and restructuring of,
those research texts as they become part of pedagogic
discourses; and their relations with, even 'mix' with,
theories of instruction.

One important text of professional advice which does attempt
to build a perspective on cultural and linguistic variation
for pedagogical practice by using an ethnomethodological
approach to the analysis of classroom discourse. Green and
Harker (1982) employ the analogy of orchestration to describe
factors necessary for the conduct of a coherent lesson. They
argue that

> knowledge of conversational factors in concert with instructional factors provides a
> framework which can be used to guide the orchestration and lead to more systematic goal
> attainment in teaching (ibid., 198).

Two models of interaction are presented, one of desirable
planning processes for story reading lessons and the other of
interactive components involved in the conduct of a lesson.
These models are reproduced as Figures 2.1 and 2.2 on the

following page, and will eventually be contrasted with Figure 9.2 (Chapter Nine).

These models are distinctive in the field in the extent of attention they give explicitly to variation in children's backgrounds, and the significance of this variation for interaction in the joint book-reading 'lesson'.

Figure 2.1   Components involved in planning story lessons (Green and Harker, 1982:199)

Communicative Event

Curriculum Demands
Goals
Strategy Repertoire
Beliefs/Values/Interests
Knowledge of ┌Story
            ├Instruction
            ├Students
            └Etc.

TEACHER

Cognitive Abilities
Psychomotor Abilities
Experiences
Perceptions
Preferences/ Beliefs/ Values
Comprehension Abilities
Etc.

STUDENT   TEXT

Content
Structure
Language/Vocabulary
Illustrations
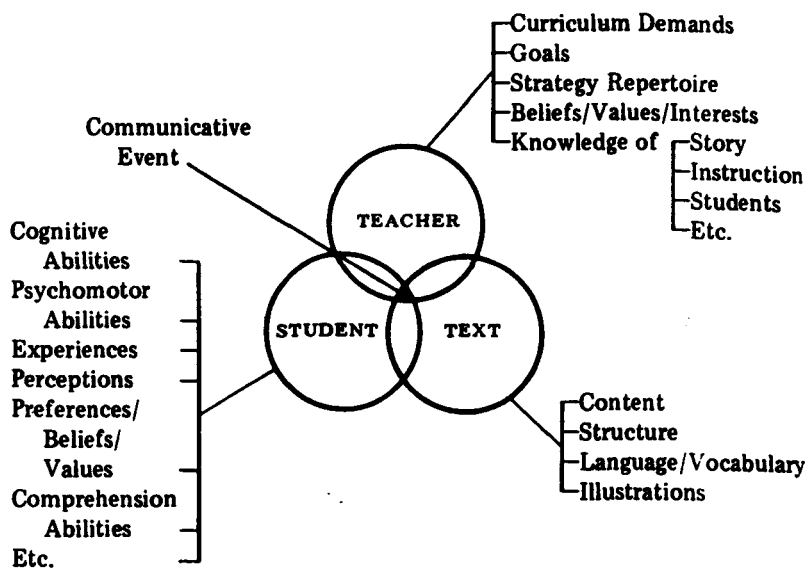
**Figure 2.2 Components in story reading: interactive view
(Green and Harker, 1982:200)**

```
                              ┌─Curriculum Demands
                              ├─Goals
                              ├─Strategy Repertoire
                              ├─Beliefs/Values/Interests
              ╭────────╮      ├─Knowledge of   ┌─Story
              │ TEACHER │                      ├─Instruction
              ╰────────╯                       ├─Students
 Cognitive                                      └─Etc.
    Abilities
 Psychomotor                  └─Etc.
    Abilities        LESSON
 Experiences
 Perceptions
 Preferences/
    Beliefs/      ╭────────╮  ╭──────╮
    Values        │ STUDENT │  │ TEXT │  ┌─Content
 Comprehension    ╰────────╯  ╰──────╯  ├─Structure
    Abilities                            ├─Language/Vocabulary
 Etc.                                    └─Illustrations
```
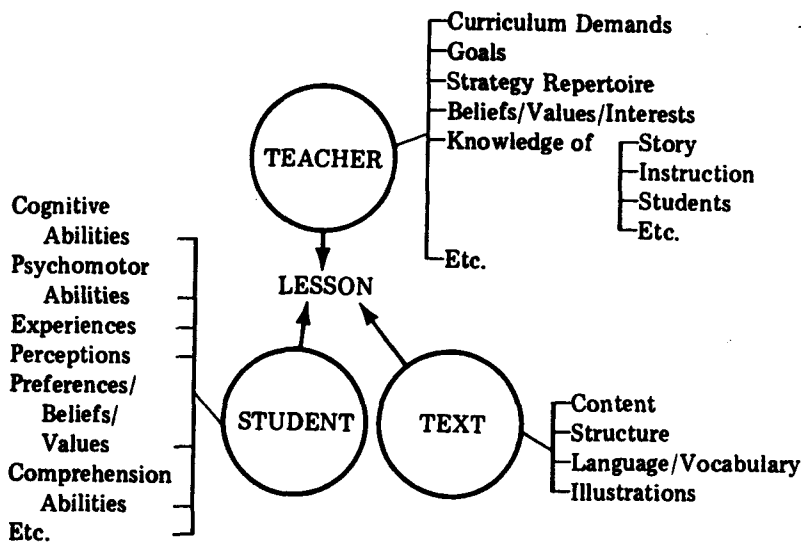
Factors listed on the left of the two figures as
characteristics of students are theorized by Green and Harker
in various ways. With respect to the effects of differences
in speakers' locations in social formations, the theoretical
resources referred to are Hymes' (1974) concept of
communicative competence, and differences in 'interethnic
communication practices'. What the models as they stand do
not explore in any detail is the factors which might lie,
metaphorically, further to the left of the figures: that is,
the structuring social conditions which give rise to the
complex range of individual characteristics which Green and
Harker list. Relevant factors may not only be differences in
'interethnic' communication practices, as is evident from the
descriptions of variation in joint book-reading discussed in
Section 2.7. They are also likely to be differences in
intracultural communication practices, which require an
explication of the structuring conditions which give rise to
variable orientations to the relevance of meanings, and of
relations between orders of relevance of meanings.

2.9   Summary

Though at first glance joint book-reading is apparently such an innocent domestic activity, it is not so when its status in the discourse of literacy pedagogy is scrutinised. From those early studies which demonstrated how caregivers unselfconsciously mediated linguistic meanings to young children in their interaction during joint book-reading, the practice has assumed a quite different position in pedagogical relations. Because of these developments it is important not to confine analysis of semiotic mediation in joint book-reading to home sites, nor to study the practice in school sites without reference to typical practices in a range of families in different social class locations. Rather, it is important to consider practices comparatively. This approach raises the highly complex question of *why* a dominant cultural arbitrary in the form of a pedagogic activity comes to be misrecognised as 'natural' in literacy practice (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990:31).

CHAPTER THREE

The Study

Part A

Research Questions, Preliminary Analysis and Participant Selection

3.1 Introduction

From the analyses of previous studies discussed in Chapter Two
it is clear that talk with caregivers is considered to be the
most important resource for children's literacy learning
through joint book-reading. Wells provides a succinct
statement of a widely-held position:

> ... it is not the reading of stories on its own that leads children towards the
> reflective, disembedded thinking that is so necessary for success in school, but the
> total interaction in which the story is embedded. At first they need a competent adult
> to mediate, as reader and writer, between themselves and the text; but even when they
> can perform the decoding and encoding for themselves, they continue to need help in
> interpreting the stories they hear and read and in shaping those that they create for
> themselves.
>
> The manner in which the adult - first parent and later teacher - fulfils this latter
> role is almost as important as the story itself. If stories are simply read as part of
> a daily routine, without being further discussed, they are likely to remain inert and
> without much impact on the rest of the child's experience. If they are used chiefly as
> the basis for display question sequences that focus on the meanings of particular words
> or on isolated items, such as the names of the characters or the details of particular
> events, again they are unlikely to provide encouragement for the exploratory but
> controlled thinking that written language facilitates (Wells, 1985b:253).

Wells' comments also clearly indicate, as did his research
findings, that interactive talk in joint book-reading is
variable. It is the nature of interactive talk during joint
book-reading, possible systematicity in variant forms of the
talk, and relations between the variants and social features
of speakers that this study seeks to examine closely.

The study is an attempt to contribute simultaneously to two
research fields: the first is work in semantic variation,
since it is meaning relations which are crucial in the
interactive talk; the second is work in educational
linguistics, since it is the potential of interactive talk as

a resource for children's literacy learning which has been so prominent in studies of joint book-reading.

3.2 Research priorities deriving from previous work in the field

Previous work on variation in joint book-reading enables this project to be based on certain valuable specific insights.

i   There is clear evidence of variation in everyday talk about object texts within different social formations.

ii   This variation is not wholly explicable as inter-cultural variation but is, importantly, variation in intra-cultural language use.

iii The variation is sometimes explained by correlation with workplace use of language (including written language) in some way which is not yet clear.

iv   The variation is also associated with level of parents' (particularly mothers') educational attainment.

v   The variation is at least strongly correlated with differences in children's school literacy attainment during the first few years of schooling.

Taken together with the specific critiques advanced during the discussion of this work the five indicative findings are suggest some clear research priorities. These are:

i   Clarification of uses of the concept of social class, particularly in relation to likely uses of relevant aspects of language (including literacy) in the workplace as a function of the breadwinners' positions in waged labour relations.

ii   The collection of transcribable linguistic data of interactive talk within full occasions of joint book-

reading, to support a systematic and detailed analysis of
language features.

iii Collection of similar data in related school contexts,
preferably at the very beginning of children's schooling,
to enable specific comparisons of home and school uses of
language both in and between schools.

iv Explication of the linguistic theoretical basis and
analytic methodologies for description of interactive
language. The linguistic theory must enable an explicit
description of joint book-reading as an interactive
context, and of the nature of linguistic variation within
and through this context. The methodologies must enable
multiple features of linguistic meaning to be described
explicitly, so that possible relations between diverse
features can be investigated.

v   As a corollary of (iv), clarification of the theoretical
bases on which literacy *learning* through linguistic
interaction could be interpreted, particularly in relation
to uses of Vygotsky's theory of semiotic mediation.

This study addresses each of these five priorities by
systematically analysing interaction during joint book-reading
in families in the year prior to children's entry to formal
schooling, and simultaneously in the Kindergarten classes in
schools in the same localities during the first two months of
the school year. The schools are those which the target
children would normally be expected to attend in the following
year.

It is important at this point to introduce a rather more
precise sense of the term 'joint book-reading' because, though
'shared reading', 'joint book-reading' and 'big book reading',
are widely used, there is some difficulty with the generality
of the terms. For example, they could apply, especially so
far as the home is concerned, to a range of types of situation

such as a caregiver and child reading a recipe together while making food, reading and writing birthday cards written with the child's invented spelling, and so on. A range of 'literacy events' (Heath, 1983) might be represented. In the classroom they might include choral reading from a chalkboard or simultaneous reading of mathematics problems, as well as the more familiar sense of a teacher reading narrative texts.

In this study the specific interactive linguistic environment to be examined concerns occasions on which an adult reads to a child, or a class of children, a text published for a child audience. A crucial feature of the environment is that language and visual images are constitutive of the activity, not ancillary to it (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). This is true both of the contexts constructed by the written texts and of the contexts of interaction of the caregiver/teacher and child(ren). No assumption is made about the specific type of text read in the session, though previous studies suggest that picture story books will figure prominently in family joint book-reading. The focus of the analysis is the text of linguistic interaction between mother and child, and teacher and her Kindergarten class, though some specifically linguistic observations about the extent of object text read to children will be important for comparative purposes.

The first methodological priority was to arrange appropriately contrasted social class groups. This is a complex problem, requiring several steps in its resolution, so the remainder of Part A is devoted to it.

Initially I will comment briefly on the inappropriateness of the concept of socioeconomic status, since it cannot of itself bear the explanatory weight required for the socio-semantic study. An outline of an alternative theoretical basis for arranging contrasted social class groups will follow, in the form of an excursus. With these concepts in place, the ensuing practical problem was to devise a strategy to contact

potential participants who held the relevant social features. A discussion of its resolution follows the excursus.

Since there is no Australian data on the extent of joint book-reading in different social locations it could not be assumed to be a common *general* practice in different social locations. The initial practical research step was therefore a questionnaire survey of parents, conducted through Early Childhood Education Centres in different socio-geographical regions of Sydney, to describe the proportion of parents who reported that they read to their preschool children regularly, and of the parents who would be prepared to collaborate by recording some sessions.

The survey was also a useful strategy through which to gather information on specific issues affecting data-gathering, issues such as the times at which people typically read to children, the care-giver who usually read to the target child, the child's preferences for joint book-reading compared to other activities and so on. The necessity for the survey was also used to further advantage by gathering some simple indicative data about some joint book-reading practices, in order to explore the potential for variation in joint book-reading within the contrasted social locations. Some results relevant to participant selection and procedures, together with indicative data on variation, is presented as background to the study.

The final section of Part A is a description of relevant features of participants in the two social class groups who agreed to participate in the main study.

The foci of discussion in Part B are the further practical research problems of obtaining recordings of talk under suitable conditions, and of preparing transcripts for linguistic analysis.

The further priorities of selecting an appropriate linguistic
theory for the study, and of developing an analytic framework
through which to describe the linguistic interaction and the
nature of semiotic mediation, will be taken up in Chapters
Four and Five.

3.3 Difficulties with the use of measures of socioeconomic status in the research field

Concepts such as socioeconomic status and low-income have
often been used as *defining* characteristics of contrasted
social class groups in the emergent literacy field. It is
interesting that these 'measures' remain so widely used given
Marx's damning critiques of them as signifiers of social class
relations. In response to Heinzen's self-congratulatory
comment that he had

> left open the possibility that "humanity" is not always determined by "class" or by the
> "size of one's purse",

Marx remarked that

> 'Vulgar' common sense turns class differences into differences in the size of one's
> purse, and class conflict into a quarrel between handicrafts. The size of one's purse
> is a purely quantitative difference, by which two individuals of the *same* class may be
> *brought into conflict*. It is well known that the medieval *guilds* opposed each other
> 'on the basis of *handicraft* differences'. But it is equally well known that modern
> class differences are not in any way based upon handicraft differences, and that, on
> the contrary, the division of labour produces very *diverse* occupations within the *same*
> class (Marx, 1963:208, original emphasis).

For this project such concepts as socioeconomic status and
level of income are regarded as unsuitable signifiers of
social class relations for the following reasons. ·

    i   In descriptions of socioeconomic status, relations
          between the levels of status are theoretically
          unmotivated and therefore they cannot be used to give
          a viable account of differences in social relations
          in the division of labour. .

ii   Socioeconomic status relations do not, and cannot,
        provide the means for an analysis of change and
        variation in practice within class relations because
        they do not propose an explanation of the structuring
        conditions which create the practices.

iii   Measures of socioeconomic status are very fluid,
        subject to considerable change within short time
        periods by factors extrinsic to relations in the
        social division of labour.

iv   The conception of class based on socioeconomic status
        does not adequately describe the distribution of
        power through social class relations; rather, it
        tends merely to label the partial outcome of this
        distribution.

v   Low family income, whilst obviously important for
        understanding the resources which are available for
        various family practices, is not sufficiently
        specific to predict different practices. (For
        example, consider the financial situation of many
        rural families in Australia in the early years of
        this decade. The criterion of low family income
        would include a wide range of positions in social
        relations and practices, including agents who employ
        a substantial number of workers.)

In sum, measures of socioeconomic status are descriptively
inappropriate in this study because they are simultaneously
both insufficiently robust and too indelicate. A comment by
Hasan provides an effective summary statement of these
difficulties.

> To me it seems that defining class by income, education and occupation labels is like
> describing language without reference to meaning; and that it would be preferable to
> devise some means of operationalising class in its historicity which might capture at
> least some of its theoretical bases (Hasan, 1989:224).

3.4 The problem of selecting participants from contrasting sets of social class relations

Since this study is of possible *intracultural* variation in a literacy practice, the most general selection criterion was that all participants were born in Australia and used English as a mother-tongue. Though obviously both intracultural and intercultural variation in literacy practices are significant issues in educational linguistics, intracultural variation has particulary been overlooked in Australian research into the ontogenesis of literacy. Additionally, the further complexities of intercultural variation, and the interaction of this variable with class, are explicitly excluded as beyond the scope of what could reasonably be attempted in a single study of this length.

The problem of participant selection is essentially one of describing the contrasting social class groups in such a way as eventually to be able to provide a theoretically explicit account of relations between social features of speakers and any finding of semantically variant forms of interaction common amongst the members of the social groups. This has been a key difficulty with previous work describing variation in the joint book-reading field.

The selection strategies adopted in some previous studies in other research fields were a useful indication of a direction. A common feature of these studies is the primacy of relations in the social division of labour for the development of difference in class practices. For example, in Hasan's studies of semantic variation the criterial feature for determining relative position in social class relations was a participant's likely exercise of power in the workplace to *make* and *transmit* decisions to control other workers. In Hasan's terms, these features indicate the extent of 'professional autonomy' of the worker (Hasan, 1989:224-5). In foregrounding these features her methodology utilises some of Wright's suggestions for the description of social class relations (Wright, 1976), and is similar in many respects to procedures adopted by Connell et al. (1982).

Of the available theoretical resources describing relations
between different class practices and principles regulating
the social division of labour it was Bernstein's theory which
was selected to address the specific problems of this study.
The theory was selected both because of its theoretical range
and an additional factor which will be seen to be critically
important in the subsequent interpretation of the results of
the linguistic analyses. In brief, this factor is the
possibility within the theory of analysing relations between
social class locations of speakers, the selection of
principles regulating different orders of relevance of
meanings in a context, and the realization of these principles
in linguistic interaction[1]. A discussion of these theoretical
resources is presented in Chapter Eight.

3.5   Excursus: Theoretical resources for modelling social class relations

Bernstein describes relations in the social division of labour
through two key concepts, classification and framing[2]. They
are introduced briefly here to describe these specific
relations and their significance is further elaborated in
Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.

3.5.1   Classification and framing

Classification refers to the relative strength of boundaries
between categories, the extent to which either things must be
kept apart or to which they may be brought together.
Boundaries between categories are of variable strength
Informally, examples might be the classification of space
between areas in a school (teachers/students; relaxation/
instruction), the boundedness of categories of time (leisure/

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[1]   Amongst the writing of modern sociologists apart from Bernstein, the work of Bourdieu
and his colleagues is of great relevance. The choice for a study of this scope was to
either describe both Bernstein's and Bourdieu's work somewhat cursorily, or to choose
only one on which to focus. In the event I have taken the latter option, focussing on
Bernstein's work so as to be able to present the ideas in sufficient detail.

[2]   In assessing Bernstein's theory it is important to note that these concepts were
developed some time after his initial attempts to provide specific linguistic indices
of coding orientations.

work, private/ public), or types of labour (waged/ unwaged: public/domestic[3].

The principles of classification of the social division of labour create basic categories of labour, and the strength of boundaries between them. Since, as Bernstein points out, 'any production or reproduction has its social basis in *social categories* and *practices*' (Bernstein, 1990:22), the degree of specialization of social categories is an indicator of the distribution of power. Therefore, an analysis of implicit principles which structure the classification of categories, provides a means for describing a distribution of power between categories.

For example, in Western capitalist societies the boundary between manual and mental labour is strong. The strength of this boundary is both an outcome from, and a means of reproducing, dominant principles held by the society about the relative value of mental and material labour, and about the principles of distribution of capital. A more specific example can be seen in relations between categories in a workplace. Job descriptions might be written to avoid any overlap between the functions of workers, or be written with a high degree of overlap so that a range of different functions might be filled by the one worker, perhaps linked to a policy of multi-skilling. The first case exemplifies strong, and the second weak, classification. A distinction between vertical and horizontal classification is also important. Frequently there will be examples of weak horizontal classification between categories of workers at a similar 'level' of pay and responsibility, and strong vertical classification between different levels. In Australia this has tended to be one of the outcomes of award restructuring.

The concept framing gives the descriptive means for understanding how control is exercised to maintain the

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[3]   See also Douglas, (eg 1984), for a discussion of spatial and discursive boundaries which influenced Bernstein's formulation.

operation of the classificatory principles. Framing
principles regulate interaction within social relations.
Formally,

Framing refers to the principle regulating the communicative practices of the social
relations within the reproduction of discursive resources, that is, between
transmitters and acquirers (Bernstein, 1990:36).

Framing values, too, may be strong or weak. Strong framing
means that control is maintained by the transmitter: weak
framing that control *appears* to be with the acquirer. To
continue the workplace examples, techniques like line
management would transmit decisions to lower categories of
workers under strong framing. In contrast, under weak framing
workers may have more right to participate in consultative
decision-making (which is not to say that the input of lower
categories would necessarily be acted on). Workers might have
greater rights to place issues directly on the agenda of
workplace meetings, to determine the sequence of resolution of
specific problems and to participate in writing productivity
criteria.

3.5.2   **Classification, framing and the social division
             of labour**
The strength of classification and framing values in the
social division of labour determine the distinctiveness of
work categories. In consequence, under conditions of strong
classification and framing, categories acquire distinctive
meanings and *distinctive forms of communication become
associated with them* because they are differentially
distributed on dimensions of power. The variable possibility
of an agent within a labour category exercising choice in
effecting meanings associated with the category is a crucial
distinguishing feature of categories. Variable degrees of
choice can exist for both the meanings and the communicative
practices within categories of labour.

3.5.3 An expanded description: the concept field

The account of social class relations generated by the concepts classification and framing is elaborated by Bernstein through the additional concept, *field*. The introduction of this concept importantly increases the specificity of description, and therefore of interpretation, of social class relations.

Three fields are distinguished: the economic field (also called the field of production), field of symbolic control, and the cultural field. The principles of the social division of labour may operate differently between these fields, with the result that the nature of social class relations may also vary within a cultural formation. Social class relations are not, that is, indicated *directly* by occupations such as 'doctor' or 'machinist'.

The economic field is the field of production of physical resources. The dominant agents of this field regulate 'the means, contexts, and possibilities of physical resources' (Bernstein, 1990:135).

The field of symbolic control is constituted by sets of specialist agencies which produce and dominate discursive codes, defined as 'ways of relating, thinking, and feeling' (ibid.). Symbolic control itself is defined as

> the means whereby consciousness is given a specialized form and distributed through forms of communication which relay a given distribution of power and dominant cultural categories. Symbolic control translates power relations into discourse and discourse into power relations ... it can also transform those power relations (ibid., 134-5).

The cultural field is the field of the marketing of texts. Bernstein discusses it more briefly than the other two fields, but gives as examples of agencies in the field 'publishers, theatres, films, television, cosmetic houses, fashion houses' (ibid., 138). He specifically excludes an identification of the cultural field with culture itself.

Since discursive codes can operate in a direct relation to either the production of physical or discursive resources, there are further possibilities for specialization and distribution of agencies. Consider, as an informal example, specialization which may result from the location of literacy teachers in an agency in the field of material production, perhaps a factory, as compared with the location of such teachers in a learning support centre in a university, that is, a centre in a field of symbolic control. The object of discursive attention will be very different in these two sites, creating an obvious potential for difference in the relevance of meanings and differences in orientations resulting from differences in category relations within institutions. As well, there is the possibility of differences in relations between discursive and production codes on the one hand (the factory site), and varieties of discursive codes themselves on the other (the learning assistance centre). The example illustrates the possible distribution of agencies of symbolic control in the fields of production or symbolic control and suggests the potential for differences in the meanings of the labour categories and the communicative practices associated with them. Similarly, agents of material production might be distributed between the two fields, with similarly important consequences.

Bernstein's theory gives a set of principles through which to construct contrasted social class groups which are quite different from those typically used in previous research concerning variation in joint book-reading. Perhaps their single most important advantage is that they explicitly theorize primary relations between communicative practices in the workplace and principles regulating the social division of labour. They therefore provide a theoretical basis on which it is possible to develop specific criteria for participant selection from contrasted locations in social class practices.

3.6   Criteria for selection of participants

It was from Bernstein's theoretical perspective that Hasan also developed a criterion for selecting participants to form contrasted social class groups in her studies of semantic variation (eg Hasan, 1989). This criterion was *the relative autonomy of an agent to exercise power in the workplace*. With certain elaborations it is also the basic criterion adopted for this study.

Professional autonomy is a relative rather than a fixed feature of an occupation. The feature gives a cline of relationship between labour categories rather than sets of discrete levels of occupations. For example, a district manager in a government bureaucracy may have considerable autonomy from one perspective, as in making local budget decisions, but from another perspective, as in determining policy on staffing levels, the same worker has virtually no autonomy. Nevertheless it can reasonably be hypothesised that a social security clerk would *generally* have more workplace autonomy in making and transmitting decisions affecting other workers than a building labourer, but considerably less than a district manager in a government bureaucracy.

There is, of course, some inherent difficulty in using occupation as an indicator of positions in social class relations while explicitly avoiding the implication that the research utilises a theory of discrete class categories or levels based on occupation. Connell et al. put the methodological dilemma succinctly, referring to

> an ambiguity about our method which arises because we could not think of a way of sampling relationships without first sampling people. We should make it very clear, then, that we do not take our sampling categories as defining classes. The object of our study was class relations and class processes; we wished to reach through the categories, which had to be used to get the research going, to the relations and processes behind them. We wished to make contact with situations where certain kinds of class processes could be expected to cluster thickly (Connell et al., 1982:212).

In this research the attempt to 'reach through the categories' was made by using the criterion of likely degree of professional autonomy in making and transmitting decisions

which control other workers. Occupations of participants will therefore subsequently be given as indicators of the degree of professional autonomy likely to be experienced in the workplace, and as a key indicator of the social class relations into which these families entered.

There is the further important issue of deciding which parent's occupation is to be used in making the contrast, where families include more than one adult. Hasan's approach was to select 'the major breadwinner' and in that sample no mothers were in paid employment. She has argued that the position of the major breadwinner relative to the mode of production can be used effectively for describing the social class relations of the family. This is because the fact that women and children are not 'in' the paid workforce does not mean that they are 'outside' a set of class relations (Hasan, 1992a:85-6). The significance of this point notwithstanding, where both parents *are* in paid employment it is clearly important to take some account of any marked asymmetry in the relative autonomy of the profession.

In this study information was obtained on the occupations of both adults, or where an adult was no longer in paid employment (always actually the mother in this study), the most recent occupation held by that person. Information on the employment history and status of both adults was obtained, and an assessment made that both forms of employment would give relatively higher or lower professional autonomy in comparison with the range of occupations in the contrasting sample.

Since level of education tends to be so strongly associated with occupational choice, data on the educational backgrounds of participants was also obtained. It was useful information for cross-checking the adequacy of a participant's employment as an indicator of class relations and in comparing the results of this research with the work of previous scholars. The information also enabled me to avoid selecting a family in

which the social class relations were complicated by some configuration such as the major breadwinner being tertiary educated and working *by choice* in an occupation atypical for somebody with that educational background.

As a further perspective on family positions in social formations, information was obtained on the field (Bernstein, 1990) in which the occupation of the breadwinners was located.

The two contrastive participant groups are called Lower Autonomy Profession and Higher Autonomy Profession social groups, following Hasan (eg, 1989, 1992a). (The term 'profession' is perhaps not entirely satisfactory but it does avoid unacceptable acronyms which would result from other employment-related terms such as 'employee' or 'worker'.)

These theoretical concepts and principles of selection were adopted to address the first of the research priorities arising from the critique of previous work on variation in this field.

The further immediate research tasks were to identify potential participants in families who met these selection criteria, who read regularly to a preschool child and who would be prepared to record interaction during joint book-reading, and to identify teachers in schools in the same location who would similarly be prepared to record lessons.

These tasks in turn entailed identifying socio-geographical locations in which it might be expected that families with the requisite locations in social class relations would tend to be clustered thickly, and then surveying a set of families which included children who would be entering school at the beginning of the following year in order to ascertain whether joint book-reading was a common practice in these locations. There was no assumption, of course, that all respondents in these socio-geographical regions held equivalent locations in the social division of labour.

3.7   A preliminary survey of aspects of family joint book-reading practices

The specific purposes of the survey were:

i   to obtain indicative data on joint book-reading practices in contrasted socio-geographical locations, including the basic question of whether joint book-reading was a common activity in these different locations;

ii   to ascertain whether there was any general indication of systematic differences between social groups in joint book-reading which would warrant further detailed linguistic investigation of interaction;

iii   to ascertain volunteers who might participate in the audiorecording of joint book-reading in the home;

For reasons of economy of time and finance, participants had to be found within the metropolitan Sydney region. For similar reasons it was necessary to choose two broad geographical areas within that region. Since, for the main study, access to both school and Early Childhood Centre sites (hereafter ECE centres) would eventually have to be negotiated through the NSW Department of School Education (hereafter DSE), its senior officers in the Metropolitan West, East and North Regions were contacted for advice about possible social locations in which the survey might be conducted. The officers were informed about the general purposes of the study and asked to suggest schools which enrolled mainly children from mother-tongue English backgrounds[4], and in which the population tended to be involved in either 'manual' (West) or 'managerial' (East, North) occupations. These terms were used as initial indicators of tendencies for an area to select residents with similar locations in the social division of labour.

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[4]   The reason for this constraint was to limit the study to manageable proportions by excluding potential variation in literacy practice arising from inter-cultural variation. The likelihood of complex inter-cultural variation was considered high since Sydney is one of the most culturally diverse metropolitan regions in the world.

For the Metropolitan West Region, the DSE officers suggested that state primary schools which included ECE centres might be approached, since these centres were an educational intervention developed from data on parent occupations, which had lead to the locations being designated as 'educationally disadvantaged'. From this general list, five schools enrolling mainly children from mother-tongue English backgrounds were selected and access to the staff negotiated with the Principal. The DSE officers' perceptions of parental occupations in the locations were checked with the Principals, and with senior personnel of government social welfare agencies with day-to-day knowledge of the regions.

For the Metropolitan North and East Regions five schools were nominated by the DSE officers on the basis of their detailed knowledge of the parental occupations represented in them.

Data on Kindergarten parent occupations was to have been obtained to confirm the judgement about typical occupations in the locations of the Department of School Education personnel. However, the long-standing school practice of including this information on enrolment cards was discontinued in January, 1988, the month prior to the commencement of the study in the schools. In its absence principals and teachers were asked informally about the 'pattern' of occupations of parents of the Kindergarten children from the information available to them during enrolment interviews. In the case of the projected LAP locations, school personnel were asked whether or not 'most' of the parents would be in jobs where they did not 'control other people's work' and for the projected HAP locations, whether 'most' would be in jobs where they would do so. In all cases the principals and teachers confirmed this to be obviously the case in the specific locality. Teachers were always able to give extensive illustrations of parents' occupations to support their judgements.

Following consultation with the Principals, Directors of both the sets of ECE centres from which children usually enrolled in the school were contacted for assistance in distributing and collecting questionnaires. In each case assistance was readily given. A sealable envelope, stamped EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE DIRECTOR - QUESTIONNAIRE was provided with each copy of the survey document, in order to give mothers confidentiality in making their responses. Directors agreed to collect the returned envelopes, for retrieval approximately a fortnight later.

Formal permission was received from the DSE to conduct the survey. Approval for the use of the questionnaire and other data-gathering procedures was also obtained from the NSW Privacy Commission, subject to certain conditions with respect to gathering data in schools, which were readily met.

3.7.1   Development of a questionnaire

A draft form of a questionnaire was prepared, discussed extensively with expert colleagues and modified following their feedback. It was then trialled with mothers whose children attended an ECE centre in a socio-geographical location close to the 'lower working class' region projected for the conduct of the survey. In the trial these mothers were asked to read the draft questionnaire individually, and then as a group to tell the researcher about any difficulties with it. Specific checks were made about possible ambiguities with the wording of questions, and about whether the mothers considered any questions to intrude on family privacy. The mothers made some suggestions for changes in wording, though generally the form was found to be clear and the questions to be readily acceptable. The questionnaire is included as Appendix 1.

3.7.2   Distribution of the questionnaire and rate of return

Questionnaires were distributed to mothers of four-year-old children attending the selected ECE Centres during March 1988. No difficulties were reported by the Directors, who did, however, comment on the high level of interest amongst mothers in the results of the survey.

A total of 603 questionnaires was distributed, and 427 completed questionnaires returned, giving an overall return rate of 70.81%. For the Department of School Education ECE centre group (hereafter the DECC group), the number distributed was 340 and the total returned 240, a return rate of 70.58%. For the private ECE centre group (hereafter the PECC group) the number distributed was 263 and the total returned 187, a return rate of 71.10%. These are considered adequate rates for the purposes of the survey, the comparability of the return rate for the two social locations being particularly useful.

Since the mothers were, without exception, the family members contacted by the Centre Directors and the letter accompanying the questionnaire was addressed to them, results will be discussed as the mothers' responses rather than the gender neutral term 'respondent', which in this case would be misleading.

To facilitate reading of the main features of this preliminary survey frequency tables for each of the features discussed in the following section are included as Appendix 2.

3.7.3   Some results from the preliminary survey

The data were analysed statistically using a chi-square test of significance of difference for the results of each question. For questions in which mothers were asked to select a number of appropriate items from a list, as for example 'What are your child's main interests at home?', all selections were coded for each item, and the results compared

separately. For economy, where items within a question were
not associated with a significant finding they have not been
reported, except where this result is relevant to other
aspects of the discussion.

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3.7.3.1 Distribution of questionnaire responses by sex of child

Within the DECC group, the distribution of responses by sex of
focal children was 116 boys (48.33%) and 124 girls (51.66%),
and in the PECC group there were 90 boys (48.12%) and 97 girls
(51.87%). The implication is that differences in mothers'
responses cannot be attributed to sex differences in the child
population.

3.7.3.2 Patterns of joint book-reading

Most mothers in both social locations indicated that they did
read to their children regularly. Only two of the PECC
mothers and 16 of the DECC mothers stated that no adult read
to the four-year-old child at home, as the results in Table
3.1 show.

It is possible, of course, that at least some mothers gave
what they perceived to be the desired response. However,
since the value of joint book-reading has been widely promoted
it is also important not to treat what mothers say they do
with too great a scepticism. Additionally, the mothers'
reports on the *frequency* of home reading were different from
what would generally be perceived to be the institutionally
desired response, that is that parents should read to their
children every day. In other words, mothers' responses do not
exactly conform to the educational expectation so there are no
very strong reasons for doubting at least the general
direction of the result.

Mothers were asked to indicate approximately how often an
adult read at home to the child. There were six response
options, ranging from 'about once a month' through 'once a

fortnight' to 'more than once a day'. There was a significant
difference in the pattern of responses for the two social
locations (p<.000; Table 3.2). Slightly more than 50% of PECC
mothers reported reading to the child about once a day,
whereas the percentage of DECC mothers was 28.63%.
Interestingly, though, only 37 DECC mothers (15.55%) reported
reading to the child less frequently than once a week.

The mother is the family member who is the most likely to read
to the child (Table 3.3), so studying mother-child interaction
during joint book-reading was clearly critical. There was
some sense of social location differences in practice, though
not to a statistically significant extent, with grandparents
and older siblings being more involved in the DECC group. The
proportion of fathers who were the most frequent home readers
was not significantly different (18.3% of the whole group;
Table 3.4).

There was some difference in preferred times for joint book-
reading. A large majority of mothers regarded the time
immediately before bed as the best time to read to the child,
thus confirming the need for audiorecording methods which were
minimally intrusive on typical interaction, and which did not
require microphones attached to children's daytime clothing
(cf Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Wells, with Bridges et al.,
1981). The time before bed was preferred by significantly
more PECC mothers (p<.000; Table 3.5). Again, for a project
enquiring about a potential for socio-semantic variation it
was clearly important that the methods adopted should
constrain the typical practice in the home as little as
possible, enabling mothers to read at whatever time they
usually chose and under the conditions they typically chose.

3.7.3.3   Paid Employment of Mothers

A majority of mothers in both groups were outside the paid
workforce. About one-third, though, were in some form of paid
employment, so in the main study it was necessary to take
account of the nature of the employment of both adults in the

family, where two were present. There was a significant difference in employment patterns between the two social locations, consistent with well-documented general differences in the availability of work in the two regions (p<.029: Table 3.6).

3.7.3.4   Volunteers for audiorecording for the main study

Preliminary indications of willingness to assist with audiorecording were received from approximately 100 mothers in each of the locations.

Additional to these essentially methodological concerns there were some findings which suggested possible variation in joint book-reading practices.

3.7.3.5   Sources of texts for joint book-reading

Responses indicating sources of books read signified probable differences in practices in the locations. It is not a surprising finding, especially given the cost of individual books and the differential distribution of bookshops in the Sydney metropolitan region. However, when the range of texts for sale in supermarkets and in bookshops and newsagencies is considered, these differences also entail different possibilities for interpretive practices in home reading.

Mothers were given a list of nine options, which included gifts from relatives and friends, purchases from supermarkets, from newsagencies or from bookshops, and borrowings from a local library or from the ECE Centre. They were asked to tick as many of the listed categories as were relevant.

In summary, though the supermarket was a source of books for both groups, it was significantly more so for the DECC group (p<.000; Table 3.7). In contrast, the PECC group was much more likely to obtain books from a bookshop (p<.000; Table 3.8) and from newsagents (p<.000; Table 3.9). The ECE Centre was not a major source of books for either group. Strangely,

of the small overall total who did borrow from this source,
there were significantly more PECC parents (p<.006; Table
3.10), even though the ECE centres in the DECC region are
interventions in educationally disadvantaged areas. A large
majority of both groups obtained books as gifts from relatives
and friends but, again, significantly more PECC children did
so (p<.001; Table 3.11).

3.7.3.6   Types of text most frequently read

Though storyreading has been foregrounded in the pedagogical
literature, there was no particular reason to assume that
stories were the only types of texts which mothers read
(Pellegrini, et al. 1990; Teale, 1986). Mothers were asked to
select the three types of text they most frequently read from
a list of ten possibilities, which included picture story
books, nursery rhymes or simple poetry, information books such
as books on dinosaurs or nature, comics, the Bible or the
Koran or an equivalent sacred book for another religion, and
recipe books.

Almost all the mothers indicated that they read picture story
books, and 73% indicated reading nursery rhymes. Only about
4% frequently read a sacred religious book, though 9.5%
indicated reading religious stories or other religious books
including catechisms. None of these practices were
differentially distributed between the two groups.

However, there was a substantial difference in the extent to
which 'information books such as books on dinosaurs, or
nature' were read. The practice was much more common amongst
the PECC mothers (p<.000; Table 3.12). The result is
consistent with differences noted above in sources of texts,
since this type of text has tended not to be readily available
in Australian supermarkets. The result suggests that before
they come to school, children from mother-tongue English-
speaking backgrounds may have a quite different range of
experiences with text types valued in school.

3.7.3.7   Reasons for reading to children

There is a further group of findings which hint at possible different joint book-reading practices within these social locations. Mothers were asked to indicate the three most important reasons from nine options indicating purposes for reading to the child, or to supply other reasons.

The reason 'helps to keep the child occupied' was cited by 14.6% of the total, of whom there was a significantly greater proportion of DECC mothers ($p < .000$; Table 3.13). These mothers also more frequently cited 'helps to train the child to sit still and listen' ($p < .041$; Table 3.14) and 'helps the child get ready for school work' ($p < .000$; Table 3.15).

The option 'creates an interest in reading' was important for a large majority of both groups, though a significantly higher proportion of PECC mothers cited it ($p < .003$; Table 3.16), as was also the case with the reason 'is an enjoyable activity for the child' ($p < .000$; Table 3.17). The extent to which adults regard this as an enjoyable activity for *themselves* was differentially distributed between the groups, though only a relatively small proportion of either group selected it, perhaps reflecting the constraint imposed by the form of the question, and perhaps also on the work situations of many women ($p < .002$; Table 3.18).

3.7.3.8   Children's main interests at home

Partly to explore commonality of the interests of children of this age across the two social locations, and also to test the status of joint book-reading relative to other types of activities, mothers were asked to indicate the child's 'main interests at home'. They were provided with a list of 14 sets of activities, including one labelled 'other', against which they were asked to provide further details.

As would be expected for children of this age group, there was a substantial commonality of interest across the social locations. No statistically significant differences were

found in the frequency with which nine items were selected.
These were:

sharing household tasks   playing with mobile toys
building with materials   pretending to read books
drawing and painting   playing with other children
making toys and models   watching TV
joining in with Mum.

(Table 3.19 gives the percentage frequencies with which these
options were selected within each social location.)

However, there were some items which were differentially
chosen to a statistically significant level. These were:
'playing in the yard, or somewhere else outside'; 'talking on
the phone'; 'dressing up'; and 'listening to an adult read at
home'. The first two were more frequently chosen by the DECC
mothers (p<.003; Table 3.20; p<.002; Table 3.21), while the
latter two were more frequently chosen by the PECC mothers
(p<.028; Table 3.22; p<.019; Table 3.23). Taken together the
four results suggest some difference in the distribution of
children's preferred semiotic activities across the social
locations.

The significant difference for 'listening to an adult read at
home' underscores the theoretical value of probing the
apparent 'naturalness' of joint book-reading in the different
social locations. However, since a substantial proportion of
mothers in both social locations selected the option from a
large range of alternatives, the response did support the
feasibility of investigating joint book-reading as a general
social activity.

In summary, the findings from the preliminary survey were
sufficient indications of variation in joint book-reading
practices to justify proceeding to a more intensive linguistic
study.

3.7.4 Selection of participants from volunteers

The preliminary survey did not, of course, target only those families in the social location with the criterion feature of relatively higher or lower autonomy in the exercise of power in the workplace. The assumption was merely that persons holding these features were densely clustered in the contrasted socio-geographical locations. The selection of participants therefore required that information supplied by volunteers be checked with them and that some additional relevant information be obtained.

For each ECE centre a list of potential participants was drawn up randomly from those volunteering, and the mothers contacted by telephone to arrange an interview. In the introductory conversations mothers were given some further general details about the purposes and methods of the project, and assured again about the confidentiality of their identity as contributors of any audiorecorded material. In each case mothers were prepared to proceed to discuss their participation further, so times for interviews in the home were arranged. All interviews took place during May, 1988.

A female research assistant was employed to participate in the initial interviews, in order to ameliorate anxiety which might be felt by women about an interview in the home with an unknown male. Only in cases where mothers indicated that their partners would be at home during the visit was this arrangement not made.

An opportunity for mothers to raise questions directly with the female research assistant was made through the stratagem of my returning to the car for a few moments, ostensibly to retrieve some item. Mothers frequently did raise further questions, often asking for confirmation of their understanding of the project or, in a few cases, expressing concerns about their own perceived literacy abilities. The research assistant addressed these concerns and at the conclusion of the interviews indicated that she would be available for support during the recording period. During the

six-week recording period the research assistant telephoned each participant to offer support and clarification, and to ascertain progress.

A brief interview schedule was used to check information previously supplied through the questionnaire, particularly about the language used in the home and the country in which the parents had attended school. Current employment status, occupation and level of formal education of both the volunteer and her male partner (if any) was ascertained. Mothers were invited to comment on any aspects of the child or family background they thought might be relevant to the study.

Most did so, usually commenting on the enthusiasm the child had for joint book-reading sessions and, in some cases, contrasting this with the childhood experience of both adults in the family. All except two mothers had commenced reading to the child from between six and twelve months. One had started reading when the child was two, at the suggestion of the family doctor because the child had experienced speech and hearing difficulties. Another mother had commenced reading when the child had been enrolled in the ECE centre at the age of three.

Mothers were provided with both an oral and written indication of the purpose of the project, which was stated to be an attempt to 'understand more about the language development of young children, especially as they approach the beginning of their school lives'. The need for more study of children's language development was indicated. The study was further described as one concerned with 'real children's language', and therefore the importance of recordings of 'natural' occasions of joint book-reading in families was emphasised.

Each mother was given a summary sheet of information and specific requests following the introductory talk about the project's purposes. The information sheet is included as Appendix 3. Record sheets were provided for the mothers to

note the date of recording, the object text title and the audiotape number.

An unexpected problem made it impossible to achieve equal representations of boys and girls in the social groups. The original sampling plan was to select two mothers in each locality *after* gathering data from all mothers included in the initial random list of five mothers, but the plan proved not to be feasible as the interviews proceeded. Some of the selected locations were very close-knit communities centred on the local ECE centres, so there was a risk that invidious comparisons might be made between those who were selected and those who were not. The risk was significant because information about occupations and educational backgrounds had been obtained in initial interviews. Mothers actively enquired about who else from the locality might be involved, and though this information was not of course given, it might have been possible in some localities to identify interviewees in other ways, since visits from strangers were quite marked occasions.

In retrospect it is also obvious that the questionnaire produced local discussion about the project and therefore raised mothers' awareness of the selection of participants. In the event, therefore, suitable participants were included as soon as they had been identified. Four female and six male children participated in the LAP group, and eight male and two female children in the HAP group.

3.8   **Occupations and educational backgrounds of parents**
Data on the occupations and educational backgrounds of parents in participating families are presented in Figures 3.1 - 3.4. Since all male partners were in paid employment no specific reference is made to their employment status in Figures 3.3 and 3.4, though these data are given for mothers, where the employment status was more variable. The data are listed by pseudonym of the child, a strategy which will be used for clarity and economy of reference to the families.

Figure 3.1   Lower Autonomy Professional Social Group: Occupations of Parents

Child's Name	Mother Current Paid Employment	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
Philip	yes	packer	paint batcher
Dennis	no	clerk	loader driver
Janet	yes	child-minder	carpenter
Rhonda	yes	word-processor	soldier
Angela	yes	clerk	drainer
Anthony	no	factory assistant	accounts clerk
Paul	no	shop-assistant	boilermaker
Ashley	yes	waitress	blacksmith/welder
Robin[5]	no	cleaner	
Wayne	yes	barmaid	labourer

Figure 3.2   Higher Autonomy Professional Group: Occupations of Parents

Child's Name	Mother Current Paid Employment	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
Simon	yes	librarian	engineer
Stephen	yes	teacher	engineer
Rachel	yes	company secretary	sales manager
Benjamin	yes	teacher	civil engineer
James	no	occupational therapist	financial consultant
John	no	secretary	engineer
Andrew	no	office manager	managing director
Glenn	no	dental assistant	investment planner
Emily	yes	teacher	barrister
Michael	yes	medical specialist	medical specialist

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[5]   There was no male partner in this family.

Figure 3.3   Lower Autonomy Professional Group: Educational Background of Parents

Child's Name	Mother School Year	Further Education	Father School Year	Further Education
Philip	8	no	8	no
Dennis	12	no	10	TAFE (butcher's certificate)
Janet	10	no	10	TAFE (carpentry certificate)
Rhonda	9	business secretarial course	9	no
Angela	10	no	8	drainer's licence
Anthony	11	no	11	TAFE (accounting certificate)
Paul	10	no	11	TAFE (boilermaker's certificate)
Ashley	9	no	10	TAFE (welder's certificate)
Robin	8	TAFE (cosmetics)		
Wayne	10	TAFE (secretarial)	8	no

Figure 3.4   Higher Autonomy Professional Group: Educational Background of Parents

Child's Name	Mother School Year	Further Education	Father School Year	Further Education
Simon	12	Dip Teach	12	BEng
Stephen	12	BA, DipEd	12	BEng
Rachel	12	TAFE (surveying)	12	LLB
Benjamin	12	BA, DipEd	12	BEng
James	12	BA, Dip Occ. Ther.	12	BComm
John	10	No	12	BEng
Andrew	12	BA	12	Real Estate Certificate
Glenn	12	Dental Nursing Certificate	12	Management in Public Admin course
Emily	12	BA, DipEd., MA	12	BA, LLB
Michael	12	Postgrad Medical Fellowship	12	Postgrad Medical Fellowship

For the LAP group almost all occupations were located in the economic field[6]. The exceptions to this general pattern were one father who worked as a soldier, and one mother who minded very young children at home in a family day-care arrangement managed by the local city council. For the HAP group both the economic field and the field of symbolic control were represented. For the mothers in this group, five occupations were located in each of the two fields. For fathers, nine were located in the economic field and one in the field of symbolic control. Bernstein's theory would therefore predict some intra-social group difference in coding orientation amongst the participating families resulting from position of the work category in field, as well as the more primary difference in coding orientation given a sharp contrast in positions within social division of labour.

The kind of difficulties of intra-family class difference noted by Connell et al. (1982) were not observable amongst these families, and did not present any problems for the final selection of participants.

3.9 Summary

The selection of participants from contrasting social class locations was crucial to the purposes of the study. As many previous scholars have pointed out, it can never be undertaken on the assumption that social class practices are delineated by clear-cut boundaries. This aspect of the study therefore involved quite complex theoretical analysis, as well as lengthy preparatory description of relevant practices through the preliminary survey. However, the eventual outcome was that the locations of the members of the two social groups in social class practices was clearly contrasted, and the groups provided a viable basis for the analysis of socio-semantic variation.

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[6]   This is such a broad category in itself it is not very revealing of social class 'location'. Its significance lies only in providing a further basis of contrast for the two social groups.

The further task was then to negotiate the gathering of data from participants in both family and school sites, and to prepare transcripts suitable for detailed linguistic analysis. These issues are the topic of Part B of this chapter.