

CHAPTER 9

UTTERANCES AND THEIR MEANINGS

Meanings are constructed situationally by the participants in interaction, as they construe intent in each other's uttered words. A well-known story (said to be a favorite of both Vygotsky and Bakhtin) tells of a group of sailors having a nuanced exchange by repeating the same expletive to each other, but with a different intonation and timing at each turn. This polysemousness of words is equally to be found in an office memo announcing a change in reporting procedures that leaves the recipients wondering what the real meaning is—from enacting a corporate shake-up, to disciplining a co-worker, to a power-grab by a manager, to simply creating an efficiency. Much water-cooler time may be devoted to examining the nuances of expression or sharing other contexting information until a stable social meaning is agreed on, which will then guide the behavior of all concerned. To put it explicitly, meaning is not a property of language in itself, and is not immanent in language. Meaning is what people construe using the prosthesis of language, interpreted within specific contexts of use. To understand meaning, we need to take utterance and people's construal of utterance as our fundamental units of analysis.

VOLOSINOV AND HIS CIRCLE'S PROPOSAL FOR AN UTTERANCE-BASED LINGUISTICS

Volosinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929/1973), foreshadowed by comments in his earlier work on Freud (1927/1987), argued that linguistics should be grounded in utterance, rather than in the formal structure of language. Utterance was the natural unit of speech and communication, with each utterance taking shape within a recognizable form (that is, a speech genre), directed to a specific audience (what Bakhtin, 1984a, 1986, was to call addressivity), and in response to prior utterances. Volosinov's St. Petersburg colleagues during this period further elaborated this utterance-centered view of language. Medvedev (1929/ 1978) placed utterance-based genres at the center of sociological poetics. Afterwards, in the 1930's and later, Bakhtin pursued genre, addressivity, and responsivity to other utterances in relation to the novel and other literary texts as forms of ideology and consciousness. In the 1950s

Bakhtin developed a social theory of speech genres as situated utterances, but his most widely-circulated essay on the subject “The Problem of Speech Genres” was not published in Russian until 1979 and English until 1986.

The view of language shared by Volosinov, Medvedev, and Bakhtin is dialogic, grounded in human interchange. Utterances respond to prior utterances, so that “each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91). In responding to prior utterances, each new utterance transforms and further populates the landscape within which new utterances will be added. As actual situated communication, these utterances (and the sequences of utterances they refer to) rely on and carry forward personal, interpersonal, institutional, sociocultural, and material histories. They enact relationships and social forms of life within the actual circumstances of life. They are charged with emotions, motivations, stances, evaluations, and concrete intentions, which color the specific semantic content of communications and provide the basis for interlocutor interpretations of each utterance and the overall unfolding of events. The utterance is a process, a form of co-production, a circuit that is complete only when actively produced *and* actively received. Volosinov pursues the dialogicality of language in the last part of his book on the philosophy of language through a technical analysis of reported speech. Explicitly representing the words of another and adopting a stance towards them overtly places the new utterance within an historically emergent social dialogue. The syntactic and grammatical means a language provides for reporting on and taking a stance towards another’s language supports the forming of particular kinds of social relations and interactions that unfold over time in conjunction with linguistic change as a part of changing social relations.

This analysis of language to reveal specific social meanings created through the situated use of evolving language sharply contrasts with dominant forms of linguistic analysis initiated by Saussure who decomposed *langage* (language) into *langue* (the system of language) and *parole* (any particular situated use of language), and taking *langue* only as the concern of linguistics, because *parole* (and by extension *langage* that united *langue* and *parole*) was too multifarious, multi-dimensional, and multi-causal to lend itself readily to scientific analysis. Likewise, Saussure distinguished synchronic (in the single current moment) analysis of *langue* from diachronic (over time) analysis, taking only synchronic analysis as the proper scientific subject of linguistics. Saussure, through these two moves, directs the study of language toward the study of an abstract object out of time, out of interaction and use, and not subject to the changes brought about by individual situated use and invention.

Volosinov criticized Saussure's approach by saying that such a concept of *langue* does not correspond to the actual appearance of language in the world, which is as a constantly evolving set of uses within particular situations. The only place such an abstract construction of a *langue* could actually exist would be in the consciousness of an individual, but that individual when confronted with an actual communicative situation adapts and improvises to convey a meaning directed toward the addressee (p. 85). Volosinov expresses the mutability and purposeful use of language by noting "what is important for the speaker about a linguistic sign is not that it is a stable and always self-equivalent signal, but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign" (p.68). He continues to consider the perspective of the listener by noting, "the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity" (p.68).

Volosinov's critique of structural linguistics has been echoed by many since, including Kristeva (1980), Todorov (1990), Harris (1981, 1987), and Hanks (1996). Others have more recently attempted to explain aspects of even such fundamental organizing elements of language as grammar and syntax on the basis of interaction and unfolding dialogic sequences within real unfolding communication (Ochs et al., 1996; Selting & Couper-Kuhlen, 2001). This research aims to understand morphosyntactic and prosodic patterns in terms of social action and social processes of organizing communication.

UTTERANCE TO SPEECH ACT

This view of meaning as construed by participants through the use of language in the course of interaction is consistent with Wittgenstein's examination of language as meaningful in specific contexts, where participants take up meanings in the course of activities rather than directly translating meaning from an abstract system of language with stable semantic referents, existing outside concrete historical interactional events. As is well known, Wittgenstein's (1958) adoption in *Philosophical Investigations* of a situated view of language embedded in interactional events reversed his more youthful project of creating a mathematically consistent logic in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 1922).

Austin and Searle, in developing the concept of speech acts, sought to elaborate just what this action-oriented view of language might mean. Austin (1962) begins the early lectures of his volume on *How to Do Things with Words*

with an analysis of the most salient kinds of actions accomplished through words, such as making a bet or naming a ship. This analysis leads him to identify all the contextual and attitudinal conditions to be met so that action would be interpretable, trusted, and sufficient; these he calls felicity conditions. At first these have the appearance of being universal and general, as though these orders of actions could be universal and logical, apart from histories, local circumstances, or social arrangements. However, by the later lectures he returns to a much looser definition of felicity conditions that depend on individual construal of local circumstance and particular historical and institutional arrangements that establish conditions. Additionally, in the early chapters of his analysis he distinguishes between locutionary meanings and illocutionary—that is, between the action part of the utterance and the representation of affairs, which we might call the semantic meaning. However, by the closing lectures he identifies representation itself as a speech act, and therefore dependent on the local construal of conditions, social positions, and interactive trust. Thus even the successful representation of states of affairs depends on local situational and institutional histories and conditions: “The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaging in elucidating” (original emphasis, p. 148).

Searle, however, in his book on speech acts (1969) does not turn back from the attempt to domesticate the social and historical unruliness of speech acts into a rational order. Searle reduces rules of felicity conditions into a logical calculus for each of the major categories of acts, and in further work continued to put this into formal logico-mathematical calculus, as though Wittgenstein were not as revolutionary as purported, but had simply identified another dimension of meaning which could be brought to full and stable order in its own logical terms outside of human time but with the purity of mathematical space (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Similarly Searle maintains the integrity of the locutionary act as a place where logic also holds sway in the representation of things. He does, however, later (1983, 1992) introduce a concept he calls “the background” which refers to the knowledge, tendencies, dispositions, abilities, and capacities people have through their experience of living in human communities. This concept of the background opens up the possibilities of variation of human experience, understanding, and interpretation outside of the formal representation in language.

While I am in no position to evaluate the philosophic correctness of Searle’s claims, Austin’s account better resembles the contingent, socially changing, phenomenological, rhetorical world of human communication, where people constantly make sense of each other’s words in historically evolved and evolving

circumstances, for purposes at hand, without rigorous calculation and evaluation of claims' logical terms, but drawing on their experience and situated construal of meaning. That being said, Searle does provide insights into the dynamics of interpretation and evaluation of some of the felicity conditions that maintain for the success of acts in certain circumstances.

While Austin and Searle were concerned with short spoken utterances (of the length and character of "I bet you that . . ." and "I declare you guilty of the crime of . . ."), longer written texts can be understood as carrying out social acts as well, though some cautions and qualifications are necessary in carrying out the details of analysis, particularity concerning the univocality and determinability of the act (see Bazerman, 1994b). That is, a long text may signal multiple acts to the readers, with some appearing hierarchically more important, and since a written text may travel to many different situations and engage various users, the perlocutionary effect (uptake) of the acts may vary even more greatly and unpredictably than in face-to-face circumstances. Thus the interpretation of the speech acts in an extended written text may be more difficult and equivocal. Nonetheless, each user will find the texts accomplishing or failing to accomplish specific acts. Genre recognition then provides means for typifying and recognizing the meaning and import of texts as well as the situation and activity the texts are part of. As people come to use and understand the textual artifact in particular ways, the genred text becomes a crystallization of an action, with the consequence that writing an article or finishing reading a novel may become an end in itself (or the object in activity theory terms—see Chapter 3, this volume). As with all mediating artifacts that serve as tools for accomplishing participants' objects, while genres may suggest and support particular typical objectives, they can be used flexibly depending on each participant's personally framed objects (Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1998). Yet, through the sufficiently mutual alignment achieved through the mediating artifact, speech acts are accomplished, for people come to some sense(s) of agreement on the meaning, interactional force, and consequences of actions.

Genre, by shaping the roles of participants in a situation, also frames the addressivity of those texts that realize the genre. As Volosinov comments, "The word is oriented toward an addressee" (Volosinov, 1973, p. 85). This orientation to communication with an external audience in a specific situation brings about a transformation of the internal word to a dialogically interpretable utterance and act. As Volosinov explains, "the word is a two-sided act . . . the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee" (Volosinov, p. 86). This dialogic situation, the emergent inner impulse, and the need to be situationally effective, "determine—and determine

from within, so to speak—the structure of an utterance” (Volosinov, p.86). Bakhtin specifically ties addressivity’s determination of utterance structure to genre, which enacts recognizable and familiar roles, relationships, and interactions: “Each speech genre in each area of speech communication has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 95).

While texts may arise to express the needs, character, purposes, and thoughts of individuals, how the texts express themselves and the social presence they take on are framed by the situation, roles, and actions they are engaged in. An immigration official inspecting applications adopts the values, evaluative practices, and decision-making concerns appropriate to the role and the document being inspected. Insofar as the official varies from these generic understandings, he or she may be said to be acting unprofessionally, violating expectations of appropriate situational action. Even when individual judgment is a central expectation, such as intellectual judgment involving advanced theoretical knowledge and critical evaluation, perhaps in a symposium response or a journal review, the idiosyncratic message still must be expressed appropriately to the genre, framed within the evaluative practices, empirical criteria, and theoretical constructs appropriate to that line of work and constructively carrying out the collective work of the domain with awareness of the evolving situations of the collective work. Additionally, the comments need to reflect the respect, status differentials, and acceptable dialogic stances towards colleagues, maintaining professional face of participants.

SOCIAL FACTS

The acts accomplished by genred utterances in turn establish social facts and reinforce all the underlying social facts on which the new act depends. Social facts are those things people believe to be true, and therefore bear on how they define a situation and act within it. The sociologist W. I. Thomas (1923) states it so: “If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Thus the worlds successfully evoked and enacted in the genred utterances can become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948), or a deictic evocation and shaping of a life world (Hanks, 1990, 1996).

That documents create social facts is most easily seen in texts like contracts, applications, and business orders. In such cases the text provides the basis for further action (e.g., job interviews will be scheduled and products will be shipped) and holds parties accountable for the commitments made in the text

(e.g., that I will complete the contracted work or that I will accept delivery of the product ordered). However, less obviously behavioral statements can also be seen as acts and consequent social facts. As Austin and Searle both point out, assertions are also acts. Assertions do not necessarily need to be taken as true to be taken as a social fact that they have been asserted. If an appropriately credentialed member of a profession presents a controversial research paper to a professional audience, delivered in an appropriate form and forum, then people do not have to accept the claims as true for them to recognize that the claim was made. The intellectual landscape of that profession will have been changed to the extent that the author has gotten people to attend to that claim.

Indeed if the statement is extremely controversial, then there will be many consequences and further acts from the social recognition that the person has made this claim. It may become very difficult for the controversialist to erase the opprobrium that comes from the social fact of being associated with especially dubious claims. It may even be the case that the author never hoped for agreement, but only wished to challenge current even views and create a discussion. In that case, the author would have created exactly the desired social fact. Every text that is attended to or otherwise finds place on the discursive landscape can be said to create some kind(s) of social fact, even if only to leave an objection on the record.

Of course, the textual act might not be recognized for everything the author would wish it to be, but then what conditions would the author have to meet in order to carry out the desired act? What new evidence or experiments would the author need to produce in order to stave off a particular objection? On the other hand, what maneuver can the opponents make to undermine the apparent accomplishment of having an experiment accepted as valid and definitive for the theory in question? These conditions that have to be met for an act to be successfully realized may be seen as forms of accountability. If a condition is not met—a legal document is not filed before a requisite deadline, confirming experimental evidence cannot be found for a chemical claim, a political claim does not resonate with the interests of the electorate—then the speech act will be called to account and fail. Of course, if the author can provide an additional account that puts the accounting back on the positive side of the ledger—a lawyer successfully argues that an extension be granted on the deadline, the chemist convincingly describes the limitations of the experimental apparatus, the politician appeals to nobler motives that bestir the electorate to rise above their interests—the speech act might still be retrieved (Bazerman, 1988, 1997, 1999a; see also Latour, 1987; Latour & Woolgar, 1979 on facticity in science).

MEANING IN THE SITUATED SPEECH ACT WORLD

At times the significant meaning taken up by a recipient may entail very little attention to the specifics of the message embedded in the text. A watchman patrolling a building may routinely send periodic message on a hand-held device or at a station, reporting time and location. The typical meaning is only in the routine filing of the text, and the construal by the supervisor that all is well. The message is minimal and hardly attended to, unless there is some anomaly, lapse in reporting, or non-routine elaboration which may lead the message to be examined in great detail, even concerning the exact time or variation in phrasing to be matched to other information from security cameras, reported information by others, broken windows, and other crime-scene evidence. Then the message or its absence may be construed in a way so as to reveal new meanings.

Much of what we communicate on a daily basis demands only a modest amount of attention, with much of it directed toward the adequate, timely, appropriate fulfilling of the expectations of a genre: we have filled in the government form with a valid address and we have signed it correctly, an email from a friend tells us all is going well in perhaps more detail than we want to think about at the moment, we skim the main bulleted points in the executive summary of a report and follow up on only a few points which touch our interests. Readings are often perfunctory with less information passed than we might imagine.

Yet under some conditions we do read more attentively and have high expectations of the detailed content to be conveyed through text signaling. At times these expectations may have to do with the density of information to be conveyed by the document, sometimes with the anticipated pleasures or rewards that attentive reading will reveal, sometimes with importance in mediating important contested social meanings requiring extensive interpretation, and sometimes with important interests at stake. The first kind of careful reading from text density, we might archetypically see in students with textbooks, technicians with repair guides, or anyone attempting to fulfill regulations. The second kind, careful reading for pleasure, is often exemplified by literary texts, biographical narratives, or historical accounts of personal interest. The third kind, from contestation of ideas, might involve a policy deliberation or philosophic issue where we are trying to understand and evaluate each other's position to assent or offer a counterargument. The last kind, of high interest stakes, is exemplified by reading of the laws in a legal case or the reading of a sacred text when we feel as though our souls are at stake. In each of these cases we put great weight on the contents of the texts and how those contents are

bound together in a single text. Such a commitment to the text is facilitated by a simplifying belief that meaning is carried directly through the text and its language, that language carries absolute and clear meanings, and attention to the word will get you to clear and definitive meanings.

Traditionally, theories and practices of textual interpretation have relied on such an assumption of meaning being immanent in the text. Peirce (1958) in the late nineteenth century, however, pointed out that meaning derives from acts of interpretation. Heidegger (1962) further noted that meaning was created only within the reader's life-world and was dependent on subjective positions and personal contingencies of experience. The hermeneutic circle, that suggests that every interpretive meaning is based on earlier sets of interpretive meanings, implies there is no fixed, solid position from which a single, authoritative meaning of a text can be determined (De Man, 1983; Gadamer, 1975; Shklar, 2004). Much of modern interpretive theory has struggled with this scandal of the lack of certainty and fixity of meaning.

Viewing texts as mediating situated activity, consistent with the post-Heideggerian view of hermeneutics, places meaning within the life-world of actors. In the text-as-mediator view, meaning is embedded in the activities of the participants and their construction of the situation and activities; thus meaning is interactionally created between text and writer or reader—and ultimately between writer and reader through the skeletal mediation of the textual artifact. If readers and writers imaginatively construct and reconstruct meaning from the thin and fragile clues of texts, then meaning is an evanescent phenomenon. Meaning exists only as long as readers and writers attend to the text and only in the ways they attend to the text for the moment. Meaning evolves as readers move through a text or retrospectively look back on texts read.

The importance of attention to the text, its specific contents and phrasing, and the meanings mediated by it, consequently, presents challenges to an utterance perspective which locates meaning in the writers and readers rather than having meaning immanent in the text or language. We will now try to develop an account of meaning from an utterance perspective that warrants close attention to the details of a text and which can suggest how texts can serve to co-align writer and reader on specific contents, reasoning, and meaning despite their individual and socially patterned differences in experience, cognition, attention, and interests. Without such an account it is hard to justify a pedagogy of attention to the text, a responsibility of readers to read carefully, and the legitimacy of social systems that rely on hermeneutic practices, such as the law. Unless we have a persuasive account of why it is worth paying close attention to a text, we have little motive to pay close attention to one another's words and little basis to hold others to account for inattentive readings.

MEANING FROM AN UTTERANCE PERSPECTIVE

Some thought has been paid historically to the problem of how texts or language mediate alignment of meaning across minds. The dependence on participant understanding was recognized in classical rhetoric by such concerns as the nature and role of enthymemes, the character and disposition of audiences, figures of thought, and the psychological underpinnings of arrangement. Persuasion, as a movement of the mind, was seen as dependent on individual sense-making even though this dependency isn't always made explicit for analytic scrutiny, as rhetoric remained largely focused on the rhetor's strategy embodied in the text. Rhetoric's attitude toward sense making is shaped by rhetoric's origins in oral performance, which leaves no artifact (except for the occasional script or transcription that Plato has so much fun with in the *Phaedrus*). Oral rhetorical performance confronts rhetors with embodied audiences whose minds they have to move, and confronts audiences with embodied rhetors who appear to be thinking about one thing and then a moment later thinking about something else. The fleeting meaning held in the rhetor's mind communicated to the audience transfigures and unites them momentarily, to be soon dissipated as thought and attention turn elsewhere. Such is the flow of life noted by the sophists.

The earliest principled attempts to develop a literate rhetoric in the medieval *ars dictaminis* (Murphy, 1971), to provide guidance for correspondence within the church bureaucracy, carry that same concern for socially located sense-making, even though transmitted over distances of space and time. The *ars dictaminis* advise embedding the communication within social hierarchies and situations so that requests appear within well-defined social circumstances and relations, maximizing the reader's favorable sense-making orientation toward the letter and the letter writer. Proper modes of address invoke and respect institutional role hierarchies and evoke socially shaped benevolence. Other tactics strengthen the benevolence of the relationship, the good will of the receiver, and the respect granted to the reader, to make a favorable reading more likely. Further, narration serves to establish the situation—building an interpretive frame by placing writer and receiver within social positions and events that construct sense-making standpoints. Finally, arrangement is presented as psychologically motivated, modified to fit the particulars of the letter situation (Bazerman, 1999b ; Perelman, 1991).

Eighteenth-century rhetorics, aimed at facilitating participation in newly powerful print culture, are very much concerned with the problem of how the writer can use description to evoke sympathetic sense-making by the reader.

Adam Smith, for example, caught up in the psychological conundrums posed by Locke, Hume, and Berkeley, sees sympathy at the heart of community, communication, and ethics (Bazerman, 1993b). Similarly, Joseph Priestley sees the force of description in sharing the experiences and perceptions of humankind so as to transcend the limitations and idiosyncrasies of individual souls (Bazerman, 1991). This mid-eighteenth-century concern for evoking understanding through sympathetic reconstruction, however, led to belleslettrism, as literature became the mechanism by which we were to understand each other's perspective and develop our sympathetic sense-making imagination. The turn to the literary text combined with romantic notions of genius was accompanied by an increasing trust in the words of the artist, which were taken to be meaningful and out of time, space, and social transaction. This trust in the word of the artist reinforced belief in meaning residing in the text. Much of literary criticism and literary education from the mid-nineteenth through most of the twentieth centuries, can be understood as attempts to increase the ability to appreciate what the text offers. This attention to texts culminates in the new criticism, which was originally motivated to improve student attention to texts (Richards, 1924, 1929). New criticism offered a way to unpack high degrees of textual subtlety (Brooks, 1947), but also led to an awareness of the ambiguities of texts (Empson, 1947) and ultimately to the gaps in meaning and reasoning of texts (Derrida, 1981). The reliance on the text also led to an explicit rejection by some of authorial intent (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946) and readers' emotions (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1949). Reader-response theories, deconstruction, and a return to historicism were reactions in literary studies against the over-reliance on an abstracted text and its limitations in conveying meaning, but this has left literary studies with a scandal of indeterminacy of textual meaning, undermining the stability of the interpretive project and its allied vision of social order through cultivation of the individual's sensibilities.

Through the mid-twentieth century, the cultural trust invested in the imaginative literary experience to be found in the literary text as re-performed by the expert reader carried the implication that all texts that did not embody or evoke forms of literary imagination were less interesting, hardly requiring sense-making, and certainly not expert sense-making. Non-literary texts were considered transparent in their meanings, requiring little interpretation, imagination, or educated sensibility. Even the higher reaches of non-literary or non-humanistic disciplinary literate practices were largely treated as unimaginative. There was a minor tradition of practitioners of high prestige professional fields asserting the special imaginations of their professions—the

legal imagination, the sociological imagination, the scientific imagination, the technological imagination, the mathematical imagination. But this always has been presented as something of a surprise and an argument for recognition of the extension of imagination in these unexpected places. We rarely hear of the dentist's imagination, the accountant's imagination, the bureaucrat's imagination, or the merchandiser's imagination—except perhaps as a joke or a criticism of bourgeois life.

SENSE-MAKING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

From the phenomenological perspective deriving from Schutz (see Chapter 4) and elaborated concretely for communication by Goffman's interactional order (see Chapter 7), however, it becomes clear how much imaginative work each person performs in understanding, aligning to, and transforming everyday situations through recognizing, responding to, and using social typifications to create sites in which people can co-align to actions and meanings. Each different potential footing for an event brings to bear interpretive and participatory sets of understandings and identifies a repertoire of expressive tools that may be appropriately drawn on. Gumperz (1992) has noted further that we use contextualization cues to signal the kind of event going on, what footing we are communicating upon, and thus the dramatic frame in which we are continually improvising our actions and in which we interpret the actions of others. However, the footing or phenomenological context of a situation is not automatically established uniformly for all participants. Even from the perspective of a single participant, sense-making may be multi-layered, heterogeneous, and opportunistic, using any clue at hand to reach a usable set of meanings and orientations to events. Gumperz (1982) has been particularly concerned with mismatches of contextual understandings, particularly as these mismatches are culturally patterned, so that we do not recognize that the person we are talking to is engaged in a very different situational drama than the one we imagine we are part of. As well, the conversation analytic notion of the floor (i.e., the group framing of the communicative circumstances) highlights the contention or negotiation that occurs to establish any one person's control of the turn and the temporary definition of the situation. The situational definition that momentarily holds the floor provides an opportunity space or participation frame for actions and meanings (Goodwin, 1984; Hanks, 1996).

New remarks not only add to and redirect the discussion, they reframe and affect the meanings for all that came before. As conversation analysts are fond of

saying, meaning is created in the uptake, or how people respond to utterances. Thus meaning is what people take the meaning to be, which they then react to in their further utterances and actions (H. Sacks, 1995). In their perlocutionary force, as Searle might say, utterances get taken as specific kinds of acts, as things having been done that then populate the intertextual landscape for ensuing utterances (Bazerman, 1999a; Latour & Woolgar, 1979). This emergent, retrospectively-established context of things having been said, acts having been felicitously accomplished, provides an intertextual (Bazerman, 1993a ; Swales, 1990) equivalent of *kairos* (Bazerman, 1994c ; Miller, 1992).

What is relevantly noticed as part of the context—those things attended to—is also at play. References in discourse are indexical; that is, they indicate or point to something outside the utterance. Thus utterances rely on construal of elements of context (including the framing social contexts that define the footing) to establish their meaning. References even construct the relevant physical and social places within which the talk occurs by identifying what is salient in the ambient world and what are the boundaries that organize local space—what counts as *here* or *there*, *inside* or *outside*, *us* or *them* (Hanks, 1990). Even such luminous and linguistically marked objects as lighted exit signs vanish from view as we enter into the footing of the seminar which indexes other realities for our cognitive attention. The exit signs only reappear to attention if we are summoned to an emergency footing by an alarm or if our minds wander from the seminar, looking for any other possible mental stimulation no matter how accidental and trivial. Relative distance and time are noticeable as particularly plastic in situations, but indeed the whole world that is discursively held in imagination and reconstructed as the landscape of our action is constructed in the talk (Chafe, 1994). Thus what things are talked about, how they are brought to minds of the participant, in what aspect and with what evaluation and purpose are all part of the typification of the interaction and social space.

In face-to-face communication all this adds up to a co-construction of context, reality, and meaning system, using socially typified frames and culturally laden symbols that allow each participant to make sense of a potentially “sensible” projection of meaning and the realities within which those meanings take place. This co-construction is constantly evolving through interaction which makes relevant the sense-making of all the participants. People literally collaboratively perform the world they are making sense of, the world they attend to, the world they are acting within. The social and material worlds humans are aware of are constantly being remade in the changing uptakes, footings, floors, frames, and indexical references. It is within this evolving world that thought collectives emerge, working in characteristic thought styles (Fleck, 1979).

THE SENSE-MAKING DIFFICULTIES OF LITERATE INTERACTION

This co-construction of a world to be attended to and made sense of also happens in literate communication across space and time, though it is faced with additional difficulties. In the semi-private experience of reading and writing, the clues writers offer to readers to reconstruct meanings are thinner than in face to face interaction. The referential space itself is a projection of the text as perceived by the reader. Without the shared here and now of face-to-face interaction, literate action must rely even more heavily on genre to conjure interactional space and define content expectations (which Bakhtin, 1981 identifies as the *chronotope*, as we will discuss in the next chapter), and on other more explicit identifiers of what objects of attention will appropriately be attended to and from what perspective.

In non-co-present writing we have to construct the virtual meeting space and then enact congruent meaning performances entirely out of shared social cloth. We may snip and re-stitch from several available social cloths, but never so much as to make the patchwork unrecognizable, for then we lose our way as writers and readers. We must create the recognizable footings and grab recognizable floors—otherwise the floor evaporates, just as much as if everyone leaves a meeting. The selves and acts we create are in constant dialogue with anticipated and actual uptakes. In writing, though, information on how audiences respond to our utterances is typically less frequent, in circumstances far from those of the original utterance, and more attenuated than in face to face talk. Similarly, our reperformances of others' meanings through reading are not easily corrected or focused by others; we have only continuing attention to the text to search for clues to meaning to adjust and refine our readings to align with the breadcrumb trail to meaning left by the author.

Further, in non-co-present reading and writing, ambiguity or uncertainty as to the place, purposes, and participants of social meeting may do strange things to our sense of anxiety. Engaged with texts in private, we may perceive ourselves removed from the social constraints and uncertainties of every day face-to-face interaction. Privacy may free us to explore meanings and sentiments that we are afraid might cast us beyond the pale of acceptable public identities and acceptable relations with others. In reading we can explore the taboo under a plain brown wrapper. On the other hand, the lack of immediately reassuring others may allow anxieties to numb our processes of meaning-making. In reading we become afraid of who might see our books or catch us entertaining controversial thoughts, and in writing we worry whether we can dare put our forming thoughts to paper lest potential readers condemn us for what we write.

To some extent all writing puts us on the line, asking us to perform novel selves which may have unanticipated consequences. Writing then leaves our words open to readers' interpretations and reconstructions that we might not be happy with.

The production and reception of texts are caught in a tension. In writing and reading we have the space to define situations and activities as we would see them. Yet to make ourselves intelligible to others and to gain the wisdom of others, we have to discipline ourselves to using signs and making sense in socially intelligible ways. Through shared tools of sense-transmission we make our separate senses, and thus define sensible differences. But those differences in turn stretch limits of linguistic sharing.

SOCIALIZATION INTO LITERATE WORLDS

Literacy education aims to introduce students into culturally formed practices of making sense in and of texts. In schools children are taught particular tools of inscribing information, experiences, and thoughts in texts and gathering information and reconstructing ideas from texts. They are also introduced to forms of literary interpretation and engagement. Outside of school, widely available texts, puzzles, games and other artifacts depend on and reward specialized forms of sense-making and engagement, relying often on school literacy practices. Those who may be avid readers but not so well trained in disciplines of schooled literacy may make sense more idiosyncratically, though perhaps more interestingly. At times we all engage in creative non-standard readings in pursuit of our own meanings and motives, but we can be held to account for more normalized readings of the texts within particular social circumstances. When we haggle over the obligations a contract has imposed we are often forced to read a text together, with our divergent readings accountable to adjudication by the courts. When we proclaim on the basis of a news story that the latest notorious figure is guilty, a contentious friend may ask how we can possibly come to that conclusion from what we read.

Similarly, writing gains expressive force not by going down purely private subjective paths, but by gaining wider command of the culturally available resources and by deploying these resources to create recognizable circumstances and enactments. Again the undisciplined writer sometimes may make very interesting texts, but their texts may be idiosyncratic and hard for others to orient towards in meaningful or at least consistent ways, so uptake either evaporates or rapidly wanders far from the vectors of authorial impulse. Within some genres of texts, often literary or advertising, movement away from the

socially recognizable into the personally desired is indeed encouraged, but in other genres projection of our own meanings and desires needs to be focused and contained if we are to make intelligible sense of each other's words.

To gain a sense of readers' meaning making, writers have regularly sought local readers and editors to respond to their writing. Modern writing pedagogy has emphasized feedback; rapid cycling of responses by teachers; teacher sense-making roles extending beyond evaluation on purely formal grounds; peer response and evaluation; and writing for varied, real, local audiences. Writing pedagogy and writing practice have also developed procedures for reading one's own text so as to take the part of others, particularly in revision processes. Rhetorical analysis also provides tools for seeing one's verbal productions from the outside, as they might affect others. All these techniques deepen attention to the interactional reality of the text and the meanings evoked in the minds of the readers.

The difficulties of making texts that will bring to readers' minds meanings that the writer seeks to evoke highlight how meaning is a result of evoking and organizing attention within specific textual interactions. Knowledge, information, beliefs, or other contents not brought to mind do not enter the communicative transaction and co-construction of meaning. While the world may exist richly and robustly outside our acts of communication, only those parts of the world brought into the communicative act are part of the meaning evoked. Even though vocabularies may be collected in dictionaries, and reference books may document the findings of various specialties, they bear on our conversations only insofar as we are familiar with them and they are present in the moment of communication.

Knowledge is not absolute, but only what circulates. What distinguishes disciplines of knowledge are procedures for warranting claims, standards of comprehensiveness in attention to sources, and practices of evidence gathering. The communal expectations and procedures to hold parties accountable form a larger context of relevance and attention for every utterance. Insofar as a member of such a knowledge community does not remember or pay attention to something everyone in the field should know, he or she loses credibility and authority. If a historian forgets the established sequence of events in narrating a revolution, statements lose their sense and are discounted as meaningless. However, the historian may not be expected to pay attention to sociological findings on social movements. On the other hand, the sociologist's statements about the same revolution lose meaning and credibility if they are not attentive to relevant sociological theories and findings.

In these cases of disciplinary knowledge as in other cases, meaning arises, relies on, is evaluated, and is constrained within social processes. Meaning is

evoked by utterances which carry out speech acts and establish social facts. Utterances in written language take their form in the produced and circulated texts, but they only gain their meaning and success in the transaction mediated by the text. Meaning arises, contingently and locally, as one person speaks to another through a thin line of words; the art of writing is to make this holographic magic happen across time and space through the fragility of words. In those written words we see a world represented.