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**TEXTS AS INSTITUTIONALLY  
MEDIATED PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE:  
a rhetorical discourse perspective**

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PRELIMINARIES

- There are 3 parts to my title: the first part draws attention to two key concepts – **institutions and professions** – in relation to the **role of texts** (the 2<sup>nd</sup> part). The 3<sup>rd</sup> part concerns the analytical approach to text (**Rhetorical Discourse Analysis**).
- Texts/Writing as social practice in **institutional and professional spheres** – beyond education and academia in health and social care, law, engineering, business, finance, journalism and other professions.

PRELIMINARIES

- Writing/textual practices are aspects of both professional **socialisation and expertise**, with lifeworld consequences and educational/research implications.
- Generally, texts are socially mediated, but more importantly, texts mediate social life.

PRELIMINARIES

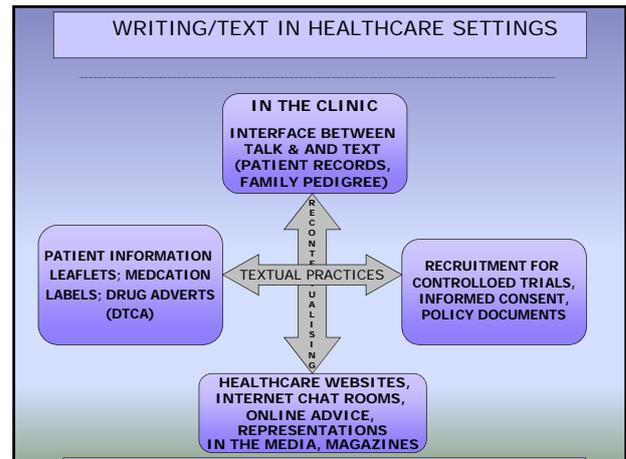
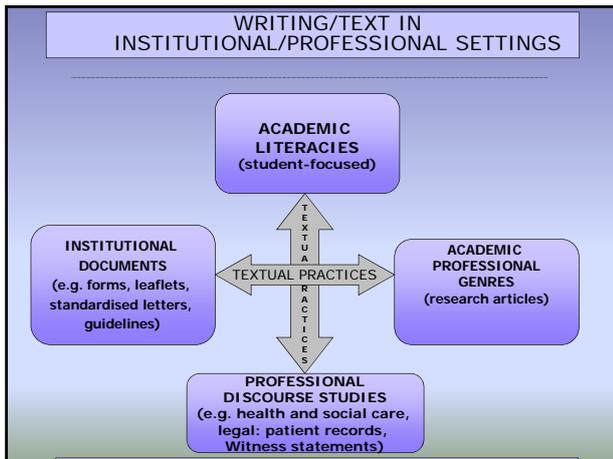
- As an approach to study language in professional settings, the **Language for Specific Purposes (LSP)** paradigm is limited in its linguistic focus.
- Towards an **Applied Linguistics of Professions** (Sarangi 2005)
- This transition can be characterised as a shift in focus from '**professional discourse as a language system**' to '**professional discourse as an expert system**' with its attendant context-specific tacit knowledge sources.
- Such a shift in focus is not just a territorial gain but brings with it theoretical, **analytical** and practical challenges.

PRELIMINARIES

- We need to expand the circumference of our text-analytical practices – going beyond pattern-seeking at the level of textual features.
- The part-whole dilemma: What are the challenges if texts are to be analysed holistically, not as a pretext to find motivated linguistic/stylistic features?
- The inherent problems of under-interpretation and over-interpretation in text/discourse studies (Sarangi 2007).
- Should text analysis be always seen as distinctive from talk/interaction analysis, each accompanied by a different metalanguage? Can these analytic modes share a toolbox?
- To what extent rhetorical discourse analysis can meet this challenge?

INSTITUTIONAL ORDER & PROFESSIONAL ORDER

- In much text/discourse research, the two key concepts – institution and profession – are used interchangeably, but these need to be kept separate, conceptually and analytically (Sarangi and Roberts 1999).
- While the institutional order is concerned with the 'why' (the rationality dimension), the professional order deals with the 'how' (everyday practice).
- We can talk about education as institution and education as profession; medicine as institution and medicine as profession etc.
- Professional practice (text/talk) is mediated by the institutional order. Professionals write case records, but what constitutes a case record is determined and regulated by a given institutional order.



**THE CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW OF LANGUAGE & REALITY**

- Language (in the sense of text and talk) “does not simply symbolise a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence.” (George Herbert Mead 1947:78)
- This is echoed in Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) treatise on social construction of reality.
- “Language [is] a classificatory instrument... categories are not objective, ready-made, inherent properties of the external world but are subject to processes of perception and interpretation.” (Lee 1992:16)
- The role of personal (tacit) knowledge (Polanyi 1958)

**RESPECIFYING THE CONSTRUCTIONIST VIEW OF LANGUAGE & REALITY**

- Texts do categorisation work – but whose categorisation counts?
- W. I. Thomas: ‘If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.’
- George Herbert Mead: ‘If a thing is not recognised as true, then it does not function as true in the community.’
- Following Foucault (1980), the complex text-mediated relations are themselves an organisation of power, which characterises the institutional and professional spheres.

**SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF KNOWLEDGE & THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TEXT**

- Dorothy Smith (1990, 1999):
- Focuses on the **social organisation of knowledge** (how knowledge comes to exist independent of the knowing subject), which is a shift from traditional **sociology of knowledge** (which focuses on social determinants of knowledge, limitations of the knowing subject).
- The mediating role of the text in the production and reception of ‘factual’ accounts.
- the actual and the virtual: **‘what happened/what is’**: the text as stand-in for what happened.

**DOCUMENTARY METHOD OF INTERPRETATION**

- Following Schutz, Garfinkel (1967:78) outlines the **“documentary method of interpretation”**:
- “The method consists of treating an actual appearance as “the document of”, as “pointing to”, as “standing on behalf of” a presupposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of “what is known” about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other”.

#### DOCUMENTARY METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

- The **'documentary method of interpretation'** draws attention to a number of tensions such as type-token relationships, manifest and tacit knowledge systems, shared meaning making, brought along and brought about contexts etc.
- As an example of the documentary method of interpretation, Garfinkel (1967:186-207) shows how medical records are treated as accounts that do not just report facts, but make available displays of justifiable medical work for later inquiries.

#### DIFFERENT MODES OF KNOWING & TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

- In **'K is mentally ill'**, Dorothy Smith (1978) draws attention to how categories are assigned by way of contrast structures. The following statement made by Angela about K illustrates this:
  - i. We would go to the beach or pool on a hot day,
  - ii. I would sort of dip in and just lie in the sun
  - iii. while K insisted that she had to swim 30 laps
- **"She killed herself"/"She committed suicide"** (Smith 1990)
- **Lost vs. stolen** (Sarangi and Slembrouck 1996)

#### CONTESTED VERSIONS OF TEXTUAL ACCOUNTS

- An example of two texts concerning a confrontation between the police and street people in Berkeley, California in 1968 (the eye witness account published as a letter in the underground newspaper and the mayor's account made more widely accessible)
- "Between the two accounts, there is little disagreement on the particulars of the story. But the official version reconstructs the witnessed events as moments in extended sequences of institutional action, locating them in textual time, dependent on textual realities already institutionally accomplished. What the witness saw and thought was going on is shown to be only a partial and imperfect knowledge of proper police work." (Smith 1990:65)

#### PROFESSIONAL VISION

- PROFESSIONAL VISION consists of 'socially organised ways of seeing and understanding events that are answerable to the distinctive interests of a particular social group'.
- Professional vision is constituted in three practices:
  - CODING, which transforms phenomena observed in a specific setting into the objects of knowledge that animate the discourse of a profession;
  - HIGHLIGHTING, which makes specific phenomena in a complex perceptual field salient by marking them in some fashion; and
  - PRODUCING AND ARTICULATING MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS. (Goodwin 1994:606)

## RHETORICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

#### DISCOURSE & DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

- Discourse is both a resource and a topic of investigation in social and human sciences (Sarangi and Coulthard 2000, Sarangi, in press).
- Gee (2005:27) suggests a distinction between big 'D' and little 'd' - 'D/discourse':
- "The Discourses we enact existed before each of us came on the scene and most of them will exist long after we have left the scene. Discourses, through our words and deeds, have talked to each other through history, and, in doing so, form human history".

### DISCOURSE & DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

- Towards an inclusive definition...

"Discourse is a level or component of language use, related to but distinct from grammar. It can be oral or written and can be approached in textual or sociocultural or sociointeractional terms. And it can be brief like a greeting and thus smaller than a single sentence or lengthy like a novel or narration of personal experience". (Sherzer 1987:296)

### DISCOURSE & DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

- At a micro-level, Schiffrin (1990:98) summarises the two-fold focus of discourse – structure and function:
- "Discourse itself has often been viewed as both structure, i.e. a unit of language that is larger than the sentence, and as the realisation of functions, i.e. as the use of language for social, expressive, and referential purposes...These two different definitions of discourse can lead to radically different descriptions and analyses of the same text because they define the task in such different ways."

### DISCOURSE & DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

- In the early 1950s discourse analysis emerged as a disciplinary activity within Linguistics. Harris' (1952) seminal article 'Discourse analysis' emphasised the need for an upward extension of Linguistics with the claim that 'language does not occur in stray words or sentences, but in connected discourse':
- "One can approach discourse analysis from two types of problem, which turn out to be related. The first is the problem of continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limits of a single sentence at a time. The other is the question of correlating 'culture' and language (i.e. non-linguistic and linguistic behaviour)." (Harris: 1952:1)

### DIFFERENT TRIBES & SUB-TRIBES OF ANALYSTS

Consider the following analytic traditions/labels

- Activity Analysis
- Accounts Analysis
- Appraisal Analysis
- Content Analysis
- Context Analysis
- Case Study (analysis)
- Corpus Analysis
- Conversation Analysis
- Critical Discourse Analysis
- Dialogue Analysis
- Discourse Analysis
- Ethnography of Speaking/Communication

### DIFFERENT TRIBES & SUB-TRIBES OF ANALYSTS

- Frame Analysis
- Geneva Model of Discourse Analysis
- Genre Analysis
- Grounded Theory
- Interaction Analysis (Systems e.g. RIAS)
- Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
- Multimodal Analysis
- Narrative Analysis
- Nexus Analysis
- Positioning Analysis
- Rhetorical Analysis (cross-cultural, organisational etc.)
- Stance Analysis
- Text Analysis
- Visual Analysis

### DIFFERENT DISCIPLINARY BORDERS

There are other analytic traditions, which have disciplinary labels, e.g.

- Interactional Sociolinguistics
- Interactional Pragmatics
- Systemic Functional Linguistics
- Linguistic Ethnography
- Discursive Psychology
- Social Psychology; Critical Psychology
- Literary Stylistics
- Microsociology
- Rhetoric

#### DIFFERENT DISCIPLINARY PARADIGMS

Many of the above are underpinned by disciplinary paradigms – but not in a one-to-one relationship – such as:

- Ethnomethodology
- Ethnography
- Phenomenology
- Hermeneutics
- Symbolic Interactionism
- Literary/practical criticism
- Dialogicism
- Structuralism
- Post-structuralism

#### ANALYTICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Two complementary kinds of analytical accountability: sequential and distributional (Schiffrin 1987:19)
- “When an analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the coherence in a text, we may say that it has **sequential accountability**. When an analysis provides an explanation of why an element occurs in one discourse environment but not another, we may say that it has **distributional accountability**.”
- **Strategic accountability**: Theme-oriented discourse analysis – focal and analytic themes (Roberts and Sarangi 2005)

#### RHETORICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

- Characterisation of talk, text and other multimodal forms as accounts embedded within a sphere of social accountability.
- In their seminal paper titled ‘accounts’, Scott and Lyman (1968) draw specific attention to the practical function of language:

“Our concern here is with one feature of talk: its ability to shore up the timbers of fractured sociation, its ability to throw bridges between the promised and the performed, its ability to repair the broken and restore the estranged. This feature of talk involves the giving and receiving of what we shall call *accounts*” (Scott and Lyman, 1968: 46; original emphasis).

- Accounts are not just something that we do with language but they are oriented to others.

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

- **Rhetorical construction of scientific knowledge**
- Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) classic study of scientists' discourse – two theoretical explanations for a complex molecule called adenosine triphosphate (ATP), one of which eventually prevailed and was awarded a Nobel prize.
- Scientists have contrasting styles of accounts: some use formal language to describe scientific processes, others give informal descriptions of persons and groups. Such variations not only occur between interviews but in the same interview.

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

- Gilbert and Mulkay noticed that the variability of scientists' accounts appeared to be organised in ways other than literal descriptions of ‘what really happened’. Drawing on Halliday's (1978) work on the relational and contextual functions of language, they argued that accounts revealed the circumstances of their production: descriptions were contextually grounded and strategically oriented.
- Scientists use different ‘**interpretive repertoires**’ to tactically account for truth and error in research interviews, using contrasting vocabularies and grammatical styles of description and explanation.

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

- The ‘**empiricist repertoire**’ exemplifies the impersonal, method-based accounts of scientific discovery; the rules and procedures governing the production of factual knowledge.
- The ‘**contingent repertoire**’ appeals to personal motives, insights, and biases whereby speculation and intuition could operate privately and informally.

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

As Gilbert and Mulkay (1984: 14) point out:

- “[The study of scientific discourse] does not seek to go beyond scientists’ accounts in order to describe and explain actions and beliefs as such. It focuses rather on describing how scientists’ accounts are organised to portray their actions and beliefs in contextually appropriate ways. Thus, discourse analysis does not answer traditional questions about the nature of scientific action and belief. What it may be able to do instead is to provide closely documented descriptions of the recurrent interpretative practices employed by scientists and embodied in their discourse; and show how these interpretative procedures vary in accordance with variations in social context.”

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

- Myers (1985, 1990) has focused on the social construction of scientific texts across different genres – experimental reports, review articles, proposals, popularizations and monographs.
- Extending the work of Latour and Woolgar (1979) and Pinch (1985) who show that high-level and low-level knowledge claims can be arranged within a hierarchy of ‘modalization’ (i.e. degrees of facticity) or ‘externality’ (degrees of out-there-ness), Myers shows that a similar hierarchy can be arranged in terms of ‘the distance between the author’s claims and the claims of the particular part of the scientific literature in which they are to be placed’ (1985: 602).
- *Negotiation* preserves the homogeneity of the scientific literature – it ‘has an important consensus-building function’ (1985: 627).

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

- **Accounts as argumentative strategies: bridging actions and attitudes**
- Respecification of traditional studies of rhetoric – from revealing underlying structures of rational thought to focusing on the *persuasive* dimension of language-use (Nelson et al. 1987; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Simons, 1989).
- Billig (1985, 1987) argues that rhetoric should not be confined to argumentative or persuasive communication but seen as a pervasive social activity.

#### EARLY ATTEMPTS

- Drawing on Protagoras’ maxim that every position in an argument is necessarily two-sided, Billig builds a case that human thinking and speaking is essentially argumentative: to hold an opinion or to assert an argument is to implicitly acknowledge and counter an alternative viewpoint.
- Everyday reasoning is rhetorically organised: ‘we cannot understand the meaning of a piece of reasoned discourse, unless we know what counter positions are being implicitly or explicitly rejected’ (Billig 1991: 44).
- For Billig, ‘accounts’ exemplify the kind of activities where arguments are provided to explain the inconsistency between attitudes and actions. To give an account of oneself is a strategy of ‘particularization’ (vis-à-vis categorization).

#### ACCOUNTING FOR ACCOUNTS

- Antaki (1988, 1994): Accounts are ‘descriptions’, ‘ordinary explanations’ or ‘self-reports’ about everyday activities. Accounts can also be viewed as ‘the use of language to interactionally construct preferred meanings for problematic events’ (Buttny 1993:21).
- Drawing upon Goffman’s (1959) notion of self-presentation, Scott and Lyman (1968:46) see an account as ‘a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry’ – ‘a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behaviour’.

#### ACCOUNTING FOR ACCOUNTS

- Scott and Lyman (1968:47) suggest a distinction between
- **excuses** (‘one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility’)
- and
- **justifications** (‘one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it’).

### ACCOUNTING FOR ACCOUNTS

- There are four intellectual developments from which Scott and Lyman develop their notion of accounts.
- First, their idea of formulating a split between excuses and justifications can be traced to the linguistic philosopher, John Austin. In 'A plea for excuses', Austin (1961) distinguishes excuses from justifications as different kinds of defences for 'untoward' conduct.
- The second line of development comes from rhetoric, philosophy, and sociology was the work on 'motives'. (Burke 1936, Mills 1940) – motives are 'accepted justifications for present, future, or past programs or acts' (Mills 1940: 907).

### ACCOUNTING FOR ACCOUNTS

- Third, Scott and Lyman's formulation of accounts is also influenced by ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) – how members produce and manage everyday affairs in an 'account-able' manner, premised on 'background expectancy'.
- The fourth line of development is Goffman's work on 'embarrassment' (1956), 'self-presentation' (1959), 'corrective process' (1967), and 'remedial interchanges' (1971). The three most basic strategies for remedial work are 'accounts', 'apologies', and 'requests' (Goffman, 1971).

### ACCOUNTING FOR ACCOUNTS

#### Three Building blocks of accounts

- **Categorization (including recontextualisation)**
- *Figure/ground*
- Sacks' (1992) notions of 'membership category' and 'membership categorization devices' are examples of how the construction of categories are associated with attributes, activities and obligations. See also van Leewen's (1996) representation of social actors (genericization vs. specification)
- **Modalization**
- According to Halliday (1985:75), modality is 'the speaker's judgement of the probabilities, or the obligations, involved in what he is saying'.
- **Intertextuality and interdiscursivity**

### ANALYSING ACCOUNTS

- **Rhetorical/discourse devices: The foot soldiers of accounting practices**
- *character work*
- Developed from literary theory (Chatman, 1978; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, Hall, Sarangi and Slembrouck 2006) and narrative analysis (Labov and Waletzky, 1967), techniques of characterization are important and pervasive aspects of professional description.

### ANALYSING ACCOUNTS

- *Event work*
- describing events (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Reissman, 1993, Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi 2006). Pomerantz (1978) has shown that attribution of responsibility is often occasioned by reporting an 'unhappy incident'.
- In Smith's "K is mentally ill", script formulations are used to contrast what others do as routine and normal with what K does as exceptional and abnormal:
  - 'K was unable to put on a teapot cover correctly, she would not reverse its position to make it fit, but would simply keep slamming it down on the pot (1978:46).
- Construction of hypothetical scenarios to enable discussion of sensitive issues.

### ANALYSING ACCOUNTS

- *Framing and footing*
- The notion of frame is borrowed from Goffman (1974) who refers to it as the 'schemata of interpretation' or 'definition of the situation' by means of conceptual or linguistic criteria that organise our meaning and perception of events.
- *Metaphor*
- Metaphors are pervasive forms of cultural and social framing which are particularly relevant to issues of facticity and categorization.

### ANALYSING ACCOUNTS

- *Contrast devices*
- Contrast plays an important role in constructing categories.
- In 'K is mentally ill' (Smith, 1978:29):
  - (i) when asked casually to help in a friend's garden,
  - (ii) she went at it for hours, never stopping, barely looking up.

### ANALYSING ACCOUNTS

- Extreme case formulation
- This refers to a common descriptive practice that involves making extreme points to bolster and legitimise the speaker's claim.
- Pomerantz (1986) identifies three kinds of extreme case formulations for analysis: (1) countering challenges to the legitimacy of complaints, accusations, justifications and defences; (2) proposing a phenomenon is objective rather than the product of circumstance; (3) proposing the validity or praiseworthiness of behaviour by virtue of its frequency or commonality.

### ANALYSING ACCOUNTS

- Reported speech/thought and constructed dialogue – constructing authenticity and attributing blame/responsibility; warrant for decisions.
- Pronominal reference – building consensus; processes of exclusion/inclusion; talking about co-present others using 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns.
- Etc...

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

### MANY FACES OF WRITING/TEXT

- Writing as skill/competency/knowledge; writing as process; writing as product
- Where to look: beyond the academic setting
- What constitutes a text (e.g. Anita Wilson's writing on the prison wall); how texts are produced/consumed (artefacts – tooth paste, wrappers, magazine covers)
- How to look: the value of ethnography; thick participation
- How to analyse/interpret:
  - Beyond linguistic noticing
  - Beyond structural moves/patterns
  - Combining insights from rhetoric and discourse analysis
  - Texts as accounts/accounting practices
- Revisit the three paradoxes in writing/text research: observer's paradox; participant's paradox and analyst's paradox (Saranqi 2002; 2007)

### RECONTEXTUALISING OF PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE STUDIES

- The 'communicative turn' in professional education/research is not so widely spread.
- The talk-in-interaction bias in professional discourse studies (especially, healthcare).
- This is also reflected in communication curricula across healthcare – reduced to not only talk-in-interaction in simulated settings, but also confined to the doctor-patient dyad.
- Textual practices (including text-talk interface) which constitute a core component of professional habitus, remain 'a neglected situation' in educational and research terms.

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