Language, Knowledge and Pedagogy: Functional Linguistic and Sociological Perspectives

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Reviewed by Diane Potts

There is nothing particularly controversial in claiming that a connection exists between language and knowledge, commonsense telling us that what we know and how we know must somehow be related. But explaining that relation and its implications for distributions of power and privilege is a far more devilish challenge, and as Maton and Muller point out early in this collection 'In terms of accounting for the forms taken by discourse and their relations to social structure, knowledge of knowledge has been in relatively short supply' (p. 29). To their credit, Basil Bernstein, Michael A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan never shied from this difficult task, sustaining thoughtful conversations about language, knowledge and pedagogy for more than 40 years. And to the credit of the contributors to Christie and Martin's edited volume, they take up the challenge of continuing these conversations, this volume examining how their collective efforts might further our understanding of the structures of knowledge.

Knowledge is the focus, and each author reworks ideas from their personal research trajectories to locate common questions and complementarities, each exploring the possibilities offered by Bernstein's unfinished examination of vertical and horizontal knowledge structures. The individual papers are wide-ranging and span the breadth of primary to tertiary education – from fields of reproduction to fields of production – yet each fits with the others.

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Moore's argument for a 'sociality of judgement' within aesthetic domains, a 'structured inter-subjectivity associated with a distinctive form of activity that occurs within a distinctive type of supra-individual social arena that is extended in time and space' (p. 126), complements Christie and Macken-Horarik's analysis of the hidden but no less powerful knowledge structures of subject area English in Australia. Muller's description of the development of knowledge in fields of production, one component of his review of historical and philosophical concepts of progress, mirrors Painter's chronicle of the patterns and progressions in her children's early language development. Commenting on the patterns evident in her children's talk, Painter argues against equating horizontal discourse's efficacy in creating common understandings with its effectiveness 'for the more conscious creation of a kind of knowledge' (p. 154), thus emphasizing the differences in what horizontal and vertical discourses can accomplish. This connects neatly with Muller's points regarding vertical knowledge structures, and his call for pedagogies that yield access 'to the knowledge steps to be traversed' (p. 82). Yet, a reader should not assume that vertical knowledge structures are somehow more exclusionary. As Martin incisively observes, 'non-technical discourses of the various languages in horizontal knowledge structures [are] far more elitist and insidiously dominant than discourses featuring verticality' (p. 254). All three authors cause readers to ask who is disadvantaged by scholars' apparent unease in explicitly acknowledging hierarchies of knowledge.

These chapters, along with Wignell's discussion of knowledge structures in the social sciences and O'Halloran's similar examination of mathematic and scientific discourses, are book-ended by histories of Bernstein's, Halliday's and Hasan's theories and personal exchanges, and by a final chapter/conversation between Christie, Martin, Maton and Muller. Together, they form a composite of how knowledge has and might be explored at the theoretical intersection of social semiotics and Bernstein's sociological theories of knowledge and pedagogy.

This final chapter is central to understanding the collection. The authors' shared purpose is to further our understanding of knowledge; this purpose is lost if each paper is considered individually. It is in the dialogue and in the relations between papers that the most interesting questions are raised, questions related to the verticality of their disciplinary domains, and the on-going relations between theoretical partners.

First, there is the place of these works within their respective areas of study. In recapitulating the history of Bernstein's work, Maton and Muller emphasize Bernstein's willingness to continually revisit the theoretical relations between pedagogy and knowledge. The result of this revisiting is a cohesive set of concepts with no aspect of the theory fully independent from the other.[1] The

concepts' interdependence is evident in Maton's work on legitimation code theory (LCT), which draws upon code theory and the theoretical concepts of classification and framing as well as Bernstein's later work on knowledge structures. Yet it is not entirely clear how Maton intends to position his work in relation to Bernstein's theoretical frame. Though he writes of 'subsuming and integrating (rather than displacing) the existing concepts of knowledge structures and educational knowledge codes' (p. 105), classification, framing, voice and the pedagogic device are not referenced directly. Is LCT a broadening of the theoretical base, specifying a new and distinct set of relations within the scope of Bernstein's theoretical framework, or is Maton proposing that LCT subsumes and integrates the framework in its entirety?

This is not an idle question, and has significant implications for how we understand Bernstein's theories and for the continuing theoretical dialogue with social semiotics. Maton's focus, consistent with most papers in this collection, is the formal institutions of education; Bernstein's proposed theoretical scope is pedagogy. Bernstein's discussions of recontextualizing fields and the pedagogizing of society suggest theoretical applications beyond education's formal institutions; Maton's knowledge-knower structures are defined in relation to intellectual fields. Given the public and private sector's increasing emphasis on inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations, the more interesting questions may relate not to recontextualization for disciplinary reproduction, but to recontextualization for collaboration; the associated political jostling for position(s) within recontextualizing fields; and the implications of positions within recontextualizing fields for fields of production. Martin and Muller raise a similar point at the very end of the volume, with Muller stating 'Our entire discussion has been assuming that all knowledges take the form of singulars' (p. 256). Knowledge regions, spaces in which the singulars meet, remain largely unexplored. They may also lie outside the scope of LCT, which raises the importance of articulating its position to Bernstein's earlier work.

The issues associated with the multiplicity of knowledge-knower relations in such contexts are issues of power, dominance and agency. These are the very issues centering the dialogue between SFL and Bernstein's work, for as Martin acknowledges, functional linguists are 'very much weaker in understanding how knowledge is distributed in society' (p. 240), and power and agency are implicated in the distribution of knowledge. The need for better explanations of knowledge distribution is one reason that functional linguists turn to Bernstein, suggesting any shift in theoretical scope impacts the range of issues that might be mutually explored. Scope implicates verticality, and the place of LCT within the theoretical framework. This further highlights how developments within each theory have implications for the continuing dialogue with functional linguistics.

However, it would be a mistake to limit issues of verticality to the sociological partners in the dialogue. Functional linguistics has its own internal debates, differences between Halliday's work and the Cardiff school the most widely recognized but not the only which exist. Within SFL, differences in theorizations of stratal relations, genre and register are regularly acknowledged (see for example the careful discussion of stratification in Halliday and Martin, 1993); however, such acknowledgments are less evident in this volume. The extent to which Martin adapts and integrates Bernstein's theorization of instructional discourse with one theoretical perspective of genre potentially precludes more wide-ranging examinations of voice, genre, register and their relevance to knowledge structures and reproduction. Such examinations might open up discussion of the different kinds of knowledge structure which Martin suggests bear examination (p. 60). Although no theorist can be expected to address the full range of the debates within their theoretical domain – and certainly not within one paper – the danger in this volume lies with the (perhaps) relative inability of the conversational partners to recognize such absences. Again, how relations are specified, the verticality and/or segmentation within the theoretical perspective, impacts how conversations might go forward.

This discussion of verticality within the conversational partners' disciplines leads, perhaps inevitably, to issues associated with the relation between these theoretical traditions. Hasan has always been clear in her understanding of the nature of the interaction, which she describes as a metadialogue between two exotropic theories (2005). As exotropic theories, functional linguistics and Bernstein's theories are understood as situating their objects of concern within 'a "dynamic open system" (Lemke, 1984; 1993), changing and being changed by its reciprocal engagement with the other components of the larger system' (2005, p. 51). Such engagement requires theories to maintain a strong internal grammar, a conceptual syntax that can describe and specify the relations between the phenomena it invokes. The intellectual gains derived from engaging in a metadialogue result from the dialogue across difference. This suggests that absorbing one partner's concepts into the other – that is, redefining what has been specified by the theoretical partner in one's own theoretical language – may erase the very difference that generates value. Such are the questions raised by the reworking of Bernstein's specification of pedagogic discourse (p. 57). Bernstein's concept of embedding is not necessarily the theoretical equivalent of embeddedness within SFL; re-specifying embeddedness as projection may further erase a potentially useful difference. Just as voice, message, register and genre interact to further illuminate an object of study, so differences between ID/RD and projection may deepen our understanding of the complexities of recontextualization. Difference combined with openness creates the potential which is generated by the dialogue.

And that leads to the reasons for reading this volume. For the reader familiar with the work of Bernstein, Halliday and/or Hasan, the volume's capacity to provoke questions is ample evidence of its value. The authors make no pretense of delivering an answer, no pretense of asking the perfect question. Indeed, the final chapter is a constellation of questions about knowledge raised by the metadialogue between researchers, texts and theories. It is the manner in which these authors engage the reader in their present and future dialogue that warrants the reader's attention.

Yet, though Muller describes knowledge as perpetually unstable, virtual, and not existing naturally in a finished representational form (p. 250), knowledge is not unknowable to these scholars. Though knowledge is implicated in the distribution of power and privilege within societies, it is never reducible to social relations alone. For this reason if no other, a reader less familiar with Bernstein's, Halliday's and/or Hasan's work will benefit from the volume. The questions in the final chapter do not extend from an absence of knowledge, but from the knowledge it offers: knowledge of structures of knowledge within disciplines; of children's language development *vis-à-vis* their developing capacity to know; of the complementary development of knowledge in disciplines such as mathematics and physics; of the implications of knowledge structures for learners and education systems. It is from knowledge that questions about knowledge can be developed. For the student or scholar beginning to explore the structures of knowledge, this volume offers a theoretical point-of-departure. Thus, as a beginning or a continuation of one's exploration of the structures of knowledge and the implications of such structures for society, the book has much to offer a reader.

Note

1.   Bernstein would be the first to admit that concepts were refined as he continued to revisit his theoretical ideas. These refinements are not always acknowledged in critical assessments of his work, and Maton and Muller refer to the 'time warps' within which current as well as historical interpretations exist (p. 14). Christie, among others, suggests that Bernstein's early research was limited by SFL's then-inability to afford a more delicate analysis (p. 7).

References

Halliday, M. A. K. and Martin, J. R. (1993) *Writing Science: Literacy and Discursive Power.* London and Washington, DC: The Falmer Press.

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