CHAPTER

2 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

take diagrams in chap. 1.

2.1 Definitions of discourse

The diagram in Figure 1.1 set out in general terms how discourse and genre, as the main focus of this book, fit with other areas of linguistic study such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics and grammar. This chapter can now discuss the central terms, starting with 'discourse' itself, and then 'text' and 'intertextuality'. It will also set out a working definition of discourse.

A good starting point is the definition of discourse analysis offered by Stubbs (1993). He starts by noting that definitions of discourse are varied and contentious, and then identifies three key elements of the area of study as he sees it. These features of discourse have been questioned in recent years to some extent, but they are nonetheless useful starting points for discussion. It is important to bear in mind from the outset that Stubbs was describing them rather than endorsing them completely.

1) 2) 3) One of these key elements of discourse, in Stubbs' characterisation, is its focus on the study of *authentic* language, rather than invented language. A second element is that discourse focuses on units of language 'above the level of the sentence', by which is meant units of language which are larger in size and scope than a sentence. A third is the focus on language *in context*, which implies that discourse is not to be seen as a set of linguistic tokens with meaning in themselves, like invented grammatical examples out of context, since meaning is to some extent governed by the contexts in which texts occur.

The views about discourse which Stubbs was outlining arose in the 1970s and 1980s, and need to be understood in their historical context. It is significant that each of the defining features which Stubbs identifies seems to have been a reaction to the kind of theoretical linguistics which was dominant at that time, usually associated with Noam Chomsky. Classic Chomskyan linguistics (see, for example, Chomsky, 1965) typically contravened all the three precepts delineated above – broadly speaking it did not use authentic language but *invented* sentences to illustrate grammar points, it took no interest in the *context* of an utterance, and it worked exclusively on the grammar of sentences and clauses, and had no interest in larger texts.

Given that Chomskyan linguistics was a powerful academic force for many years, it is perhaps no surprise that those engaged in the emerging study of discourse in the 1970s and 1980s should define their discipline against that prevailing set of ideas, to mark out their territory and to show in which ways their endeavour was distinctive. However, defining one area of study by contrasting it with another does not mean that the resulting definition is necessarily complete or appropriate, or that it will stand the test of time. For this reason, and also in the light of advances in our understanding of discourse, each of the elements of the definition of discourse and discourse analysis which Stubbs set out have come to be reconsidered in the intervening years, especially now that discourse analysis is no longer under pressure to react to the dominance of Chomskyan linguistics.

This chapter will examine the three features identified by Stubbs as a starting point and will proceed by accepting two of them, revising the third and identifying three further areas where that view of discourse and how to approach it has been amended and supplemented in recent thinking. The aim is to elaborate and explain, through the six features which will result from the discussion, a more satisfactory working definition of discourse and discourse analysis which can serve as the basis for our discussion in the rest of the book. 6 feat

Of Stubbs' three defining features, the two which are still broadly retained in current views of the discipline are the view that the subject matter of discourse analysis typically consists of *authentic* texts, by which are meant texts which are not invented by the analyst but are naturally occurring, and secondly that these texts are to be studied and understood with reference to *context*. The first of these is relatively uncontroversial (although as Chapman (2006) argues, even non-authentic texts have their place in linguistic study). However, the issue of context, the second of Stubbs' features, needs closer examination. 1)

Context in the study of discourse

2)

The importance of taking account of context can be illustrated by the example of the Barbecue Sign text at the end of Chapter 1, from which it was amply clear that the context of the sign played a crucial part in my understanding of its function, as well as my understanding of its lexis and other features.

However, this arguably depends on a rather simplistic view of context, assuming that it is an objective, unchanging dimension of the text which all readers of that sign would be able to access in an identical way.

It has been suggested, most pointedly by Blommaert (2005), that the concept of 'context' has at times been treated too uncritically in the analysis of discourse. Blommaert accuses some analysts, for example in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tradition, of recognising the theoretical centrality of the concept in principle, but in practice of treating 'context [as] often a mere background to rather orthodox (linguistic or interactional) discourse analysis' (Blommaert, 2005:53). The point of this critique is that not only should we include in our analyses all aspects of context, so far as we can see them, including 'everything in the material, mental, personal, interactional, social, institutional, cultural and historical situation in which the utterance was made' (Gee, 2005:54), but that our approach to the analysis of discourse should incorporate these contextual elements far more systematically than it did previously.

One step towards this is to see context in terms of the concept of *contextualisation* (Gumperz, 1982; 1992) which

> comprises all activities by participants which make relevant, maintain, revise, cancel…any aspect of context which, in turn, is responsible for the interpretation of an utterance in its particular locus of occurrence. (Auer, 1992:4, in Blommaert, 2005:41)

To put it another way, 'context is not an external set of circumstances but a selection of them internally represented in the mind' (Widdowson, 2007:20). For this reason, the relevant context in a piece of discourse might include factors which are not even physically present at all – say in the case of a letter which mentions something known to the writer and recipient but which neither can actually see. However, it perhaps goes without saying that

> [a]lthough there can be no appeal to a common situation, however, there must be an appeal to a common context of shared knowledge or otherwise no communication can take place at all. (Widdowson, 2007:21, emphasis added)

How, then, can context be 'retrieved' by the discourse analyst if it is in the minds of the users? In conversational discourse, instances of hesitation or other linguistic and non-linguistic features could potentially be interpreted as clues to the response of the interactants to aspects of the context, and can therefore potentially provide clues about aspects of the context which are of relevance to them. For example, in a setting where there is a power differential between speakers it might be possible to identify elements of that power differential, as perceived by participants, in their actual linguistic and other choices.

However, the situation is more problematic with written discourse. In the case of the Barbecue Sign, for instance, the analyst would appear to have recourse only to the text itself. One answer is that even in this case the text does offer certain clues which allow deductions about the context – the use of imperatives for example carries implications about power relations. These could be complemented by research, perhaps ethnographic, into the responses of those in the community and the ways in which they construct the socio-political and other contextual factors affecting their interpretation. However, the issue is not a straightforward one.

Further discussion and examples of how context can be taken into account in the analytical process will be considered in Chapter 5, and also in several of the analyses of texts in the second half of the book. In addition, Chapter 10 discusses a discourse analysis project which uses ethnography to attempt to take account of context in the analytical process, which will serve as an illustration of how it can perhaps be done in practice.

Beyond the sentence?

of any length

3

The third plank of Stubbs' characterisation of discourse, that it concerns texts 'beyond the sentence level', is still mentioned in recent discussions, for example by Paltridge (2006:2): 'Discourse analysis focuses on knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase and sentence' (Paltridge 2006:2). Thornbury even uses it in the title of his book about discourse analysis for teachers: *Beyond the Sentence: Introducing Discourse Analysis*. However, it has been pointed out (for example by Widdowson, 1995; 2004; and Cameron, 2001) that there are many examples of discourse which are authentic, and found in real contexts, but which cannot convincingly be described as being 'beyond the level of the sentence'. Widdowson gives numerous examples, such as a sign on a door which reads LADIES, and a sign consisting of the letter P to indicate a place to park (Widdowson, 1995; see also 2004). Here is a similar example (Illustration 2.1). What can we make of the picture? Where might we encounter it? Is it a sentence?

This photograph was taken in an airport – but is it a sentence or 'beyond a sentence'? Clearly it is neither, as it consists of no more than a question mark and the letter 'i', but the key point is that it is nonetheless perfectly comprehensible *discourse*, no matter how brief. When I saw it I understood at once that it was a sign indicating an airport information desk, a fact which was clear to me because of my previous experience of such signs, its location,

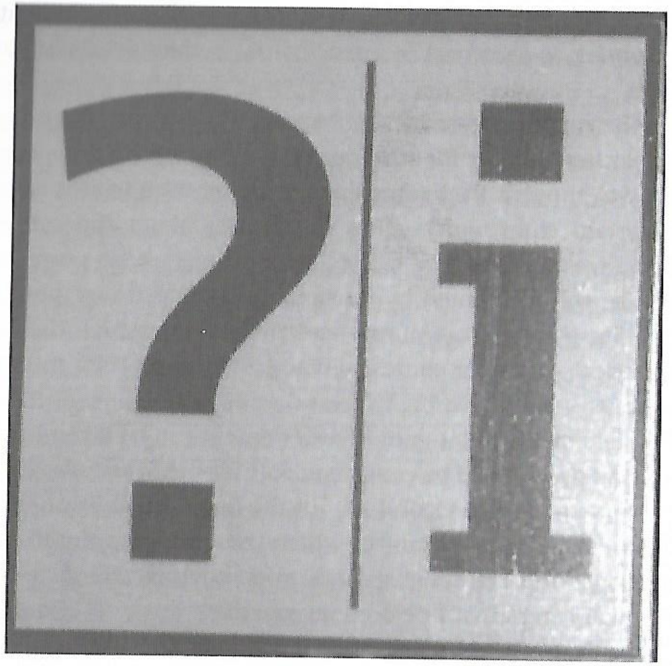

Illustration 2.1 Information sign

and my prior knowledge of airports, all of which led me to understand that the letter *'i'* indicated *information* of some sort.

The important point here is that such a sign is no less an example of discourse than a longer text, and we use the same processes to understand it. It therefore seems irrational for discourse analysts to exclude such short texts from their field of study simply for the apparently arbitrary reason that they are not 'beyond the sentence'. If we seek to understand discourse in the real world such arbitrary exclusions seem pointless. It is true that discourse analysts tend to *prefer* to study longer texts and to look at the relations between the parts of those texts, the ways they link together and so on, but why exclude shorter texts? In addition, Widdowson (2004) points out a further problem with the word 'sentence' in such classical definitions, because when we speak we do not always make use of complete sentences. For these and other reasons the definition of discourse in this book will dispense with any reference to sentences, or even clauses, or of discourse restricting itself to any domain 'beyond' them. That element of the definition described by Stubbs would seem, in the light of examples such as the one above, to be untenable and unhelpful. The definition of discourse study characterised by Stubbs can therefore be amended to say instead that discourse studies can include texts of any size, written or spoken, so long as they are authentic and considered in context.

2.2 What is a text?

4)

It can be accepted, then, that discourse concerns itself with *authentic* texts, by which is meant texts which are not constructed artificially. Secondly, discourse relates to texts in *context,* broadly conceived, for reasons noted above. Stubbs' third point is now revised to say that the study of discourse concerns itself with texts of any size, written or spoken. But at this point it is important to ask: what is meant by texts exactly? As Widdowson (2004) points out, many writers on discourse seem to use the terms 'text' and 'discourse' interchangeably, and this can be confusing, so it will be useful at this point to try to distinguish them more clearly.

In the first place, of course, the word 'text' is meant – as in other books in this series (see Jeffries, 2006:2) – to cover both spoken and written language. However, can we distinguish between language which constitutes a text and language which does not? For instance, we might ask whether this list of words is 'a text' or not:

> bank great age installation total amazing whiteboard classics

In some extreme circumstances (in modem poetry, for example) we might find language similar to this which someone might call a 'text', but usually we would not do so. (In fact it is a list of scattered words I happen to see when I look around the room as I type.) We might say in a commonsense way that it is not a text because it is 'not meaningful', but linguists have attempted rather more formal definitions of what distinguishes a text from a non-text. In a famous early account in the 1970s Halliday and Hasan proposed that what distinguishes a text from a non-text could be called 'texture', and they explained this as follows:

> A text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. It derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a unity with respect to its environment. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:2)

This may seem rather circular at first sight, but it helps us to understand why the string of random words listed above could not typically be called a 'text', because it does not in any way 'function as a unity'. Halliday and Hasan went on to argue that 'texture' is largely the result of cohesive ties within the text which link the parts together. Again this appears convincing because my random string of words does not have any ties of this sort, including any grammatical ties or relationships between the words. In short, Halliday and Hasan offer a useful starting point: texts are distinguished from non-texts because they seem to function as a unity, and also because they seem to have 'cohesive ties' of various kinds serving to link the parts together (in ways discussed further by Jeffries, 2006:183–7)

However, when we look more closely at this, it becomes rather problematic. In the short texts we mentioned above, namely the *P* on a sign for parking, or the *?i* on a sign for an information desk, it is difficult to see anything in those texts themselves which is 'cohesive'. It is true that each of them 'functions as a unity with respect to its environment' as Halliday and Hasan put it, but this is not owing to anything exactly 'cohesive' within the texts themselves, so much as to the prior knowledge which we ourselves supply. For this reason it is difficult to offer a definition of text which relies on an idea of 'texture' if that in turn relies on some 'cohesion' which may not be at all evident. Indeed Halliday himself later revised his definition of a text, making it far broader:

> We can define text, in the simplest way perhaps, by saying that it is language that is functional. By functional, we simply mean language that is doing some job in some context. (Halliday, 1989:10)

This is broader and more inclusive, and would now embrace the basic sign at the airport which we saw above, but it may at the same time be too general for our purposes. For example if function were the only criterion, how could we distinguish a 'text' from a 'genre' since both are 'functional'? Something more than this is needed in order to make such distinctions clear.

This book will therefore adopt a broad definition of 'text' as being, as Halliday says, an instance of 'language that is doing some job in some context', to include both written and spoken language. A text in this definition could be 'any tissue of meaning which is symbolically significant for a reader' (Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network, 1999:4), perhaps even to include 'objects like trainers, or events like football matches, or other things like food, or walking styles' (Rapley, 2007:133). However, unlike those authors who use the word 'text' very broadly to encompass also *non*-linguistic creations, I will use the word 'text' in this book to refer only to those artefacts which include a language element.

4)

Genres are not texts

Furthermore, *texts* in this book will refer to *actual* instances of language. This will be important as the discussion proceeds, since they will be distinguished in this way from *genres*. In the definition to be elaborated below, genres will be viewed as 'prototypes' which we draw on as language users while we create or interpret actual texts. As such, genres will be understood as mental constructs similar to schemas, frames and scripts, also to be discussed below. Texts, by contrast, are defined as the actual manifestations of language in the world; they draw on our mental ideas of genres, but may differ from those genres in various creative ways, or may mix genres creatively for particular functional and communicative purposes.

2.3 Intertextuality

To summarise: the definition of discourse to be followed here subscribes to the standard view, expressed by Stubbs, that discourse deals with *authentic* language (not invented), with language in *context* (not decontextualised), and that discourse includes texts of all kinds and all sizes, texts being actual instances of language, written or spoken. The fourth dimension, to be considered next, relates to *intertextuality*, and can be explained through the following example, this time taken from a political speech.

Barack Obama, when he was fighting for the Democrat nomination for US President in 2008, had just been defeated in one of the primary elections when he delivered an inspirational speech to rally his supporters. Here is a small part of the speech (which will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 9):

> It was the call of workers who organized, women who reached for the ballot, a president who chose the moon as our new frontier, and a king who took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the promised land: Yes, we can, to justice and equality.

As has already been noted, when attempting to understand this or any other discourse it is important from the outset to take account of the context in which it is encountered and produced, and this will be part of the fuller analysis of Obama's speech in Chapter 9. Here, however, it is sufficient to note that Obama had just lost a crucial vote and was aiming to rally his dejected supporters, and he did so by including several echoes of other events, references to other people and allusions to other texts.

This serves as an illustration, then, of the fourth feature of discourse which I consider important, and which was not part of Stubbs' classic account of the defining features of discourse, namely the fact that texts do not occur in isolation from each other. When Obama mentions 'a president who chose the moon as our new frontier', he is referring specifically to President John F. Kennedy, and in particular to his 1961 speech when Kennedy memorably set the aim of 'landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth'.

Furthermore, Obama's naming of 'a king' who 'took us to the mountaintop and pointed the way to the promised land' is a deliberate reference to Martin Luther King and his 1968 speech, a speech which itself in turn used and borrowed the ideas of 'mountaintop' and 'promised land' from the Bible.

This brief example shows that for the analyst it is important to recognise that without knowledge of other relevant texts, the listener would miss the full impact of Obama's message. This relationship between one text and others is part of what is usually called *intertextuality* (see, for example, Allen, 2000). This aspect, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 9, has long been recognised as important in discourse, but is usually treated as an interesting aside. To my mind, however, intertextuality is of such importance in the understanding of how texts work and are interpreted that it will be included in the main definition of discourse in this book as the fourth defining feature along with the other defining characteristics already cited.

It might be thought that intertextuality simply means textual references from one text to another, as for example when Obama in his speech refers to Martin Luther King's speech, and King in his speech referred to the Bible. Indeed some writers do present intertextuality in this rather restricted sense, as in this account:

> Intertextuality involves both the intrusion (or adoption by the speaker/author) of aspects of previous texts into a new text either through citation, attribution or reference, and also the hybridization of one genre or text type with another. (Bloor and Bloor, 2007:51–2)

Here, Bloor and Bloor present intertextuality as having essentially two aspects, the first of which we can call the *referencing* aspect in which one text cites or refers to another (which is perhaps the type we have seen in Obama's speech) and the second being the *genre-mixing* aspect, or the way in which one genre or text type 'hybridizes' or mixes and merges with another (Fairclough, 2003:34). These are certainly important aspects of intertextuality, and will be considered further in later chapters, but in my view this represents a rather limited perspective on intertextuality because it focuses attention exclusively on the *product* or the artefact which is the text itself, and tends to ignore the *process*. It is crucial, I suggest, to realise that intertextuality is something even more fundamental to text production and comprehension than this characterisation implies.

Intertextuality in the 'Squirrel' text

This can be illustrated with reference to some of the texts examined in Chapter 1, particularly the 'Squirrel' text. Two key aspects of the girls' written note

in their squirrel game are, firstly, the fact that they were copying *their whole game* from a text they knew (a story book about an elephant), and secondly, the fact that the concept of second wives, which entered in an important way into their writing of the text, was directly drawn from stories they know about wicked stepmothers. (Neither of the girls had a wicked stepmother themselves, incidentally).

This is therefore an example of the way in which behaviour, and also texts and text creation, derive from and in other important ways relate to a variety of texts *intertextually* in an interwoven net of allusions. The girls in their game were drawing on a range of intertextual links throughout the process of text construction. Intertextuality here was far more than the type of simple referencing which Bloor and Bloor mentioned, but was instead at the heart of the process. Indeed it arguably played even more of a role, since besides the allusions to actual stories they knew, the girls were also drawing on their intertextual knowledge of wider conventional genres as a whole, namely their knowledge of the letter genre, and their knowledge of the birthday card genre, to produce a sort of hybrid which is not quite a letter and not quite a card. As readers, we too needed to follow similar processes in order to comprehend the text. Intertextuality, in other words, came into the creation and interpretation of the text in a number of fundamental ways and from a number of sources.

In the light of this example intertextuality can therefore be seen to be not only an intrinsic feature of texts themselves but a crucial and integral part of the *process* of a text's creation, and also the process of its interpretation. Without the girls' knowledge of those other genres and particular texts they could not have created that letter; without our knowledge of those same other texts, or at least of some of them, we could not as readers have understood it.

This demonstrates the fact that *intertextual knowledge*, far more than simply a matter of identifying references in a text, or noticing genre-mixing, is closely related to our *genre knowledge* and therefore enters into the whole process of text creation and of text comprehension in fundamental ways. For this reason intertextuality will be treated here as a fundamental part of the revised definition of discourse; our fourth defining feature.

2.4 The relation between language and the world: discourse and social constructionism

The second feature of Stubbs' original description of discourse has already been discussed and accepted; namely that context is an important aspect of discourse and of how we understand it. However, it is useful to expand on this to address the question of precisely how the relationship between language and context operates. Answering the related questions of how the feature of discourse, namely the way in which discourse operates in part to *construct* viewpoints and ideologies.

Clearly the world has an impact on the language we use and choose. An elementary example is that when we write about a woman as opposed to a man we must in many languages choose a feminine pronoun instead of a masculine one (in English 'she' instead of 'he'). Real world gender therefore impacts in an obvious way on the language we use. At a more complex level we can find within the 'Squirrel' text several elements which reflect the real world of its production. For example the graphical aspects of the writing, as well as the spelling and some of the punctuation, reflect the fact that it is written by a child. Similarly, whenever we read or listen to language, we can see elements reflected from the world outside the text. So language use is obviously affected by aspects of the world around us, and reflects that world.

5)

How language affects the world: social constructionism

However, this does not mean that language is merely a passive mirror reflecting the world around us. The relationship cuts both ways, because language both *reflects* the world and *affects* it. In fact it is fundamental to discourse analysis that we see language from a broadly *constructionist perspective* (Rapley, 2007). Social constructionism is in essence a philosophical approach which considers that the world around us, particularly the social world, is not merely given to us fully formed, but is in some sense 'constructed' by us. This broad world view was in part spearheaded by the publication in 1966 of Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. That treatise argued that our sense of reality is not simply 'there', but is to some extent constructed and learned socially as we grow up.

Discourse analysis takes this a step further by assuming that language plays a crucial part in that process of *constructing* reality. When we hear an adult telling a child that 'schooldays are the best days of your life', this is not simply a statement of fact. It is part of a particular *construction* of schooling projected by adult discourse, probably to make the child go to school and study harder. Fundamental to the study of discourse, therefore, is the sense that the world around us is *constructed by the discourse* we use: discourse analysts implicitly assume a constructionist position from the start. 'The basic premise for the discourse analyst is that the "social" world does not exist independently of our constructions of it' (Wood and Kroger, 2000:167). We can illustrate this constructive dimension through some short examples. The first exemplifies the way in which discourse can construct our sense of place, and the second shows how discourse can construct a person and gender.

Constructing places

The first example of discourse construction, then, comes from a tourist website promoting sights in Sydney, Australia. Its intention is clearly to persuade us to visit the places in question. Here is one part of the text of that webpage.

> *Skywalk Sydney Tower for an exhilarating 60 minute outdoor experience! Feel perfectly safe, yet perfectly exhilarated, taking in views 260 metres above the harbour city. Dare to step out over the edge and face Sydney like never before, feel the high-altitude breeze and touch the clouds! Skywalk will literally send you over the edge! Suspended from Sydney Tower's limits, you will get sensational 360-degree views of Sydney from 260metres above street level!* (http://www.redballoon.com.au)

Every text, even a small one like this, can be seen in terms of how it constructs the world around us. In this case, how did the text construct the Sydney Skywalk? The photograph which accompanied the original text played its part, as it viewed the skywalk from high above, capturing both the distance to the ground and the apparently slender support holding up the platform, to give a sense of danger and excitement. This is reinforced by the linguistic elements, for example the imperative verb 'dare' and the many exclamation marks in the text, the focus on the height and the panorama with the repeated figure '260', the frequent use of words like 'sensational', touch the clouds!' 'exhilarating'. In summary, the text aims to construct the Skywalk as thrilling and adventurous, fulfilling the first part of any advertisement's function, namely to attract the reader. Other elements of the webpage text, such as the booking and transport information, then enable tourists to reach the location straightforwardly, thereby fulfilling the second part of the text's function, namely to give enough information so that the consumer can actually 'buy the product' in practice.

Constructing gender

A second example of how discourse can construct our viewpoint relates to gender. In September 2007, Harriet Harman was an important Labour Party politician in Britain. At the time she was campaigning on an important issue, namely equal pay for women. This could have been presented in the media as an important intervention by a significant national figure. However, this is how one national newspaper chose to present her:

> Long-legged lovely Harriet Harman stomped around town yesterday angrily demanding pay increases for women in the public sector to put an end to the 'equality gap' with men's salaries. (*Daily Mail*, 22 September 2007, p. 24)

Instead of presenting her as significant and serious-minded, as they could have done, the newspaper (which supports the opposing political party) has chosen to present her as 'long-legged' and 'lovely'. At first glance this might seem to be a compliment, but of course by emphasising her appearance the newspaper succeeds in drawing attention away from her ideas. To put it another way, in *constructing* her in terms of a female body, emphasising her physique, and then later in the text *constructing* her as a temperamental child 'stomping…angrily' the writer succeeds in distracting us and therefore sidelining and belittling her ideas. What is more, it reinforces existing stereotypical views of the value of women as being largely decorative, and nothing more. This shows how the choices we make in language, of what to focus on, of which verb to choose for an action, of which adjective to choose when describing someone, all *construct* for readers important impressions about the world. Discourse should not be seen merely as a neutral vehicle for conveying facts, but as a *constructionist* device, playing its part in constructing the world around us.

George Orwell knew about this. At the beginning of his political novel *1984* the country of Oceania is at war with Eurasia. However, during the course of the novel allegiances suddenly switch without explanation and the enemy now becomes Eastasia, the former ally, with Eurasia now a friend and ally. Winston, the main character of the novel, finds this out at a demonstration, and has to rush to the Ministry of Truth where he works.

> The instant that the demonstration was over he went straight to the Ministry of Truth, though the time was now nearly twenty-three hours. The entire staff of the Ministry had done likewise. The orders already issuing from the telescreen, recalling them to their posts, were hardly necessary. Oceania was at war with Eastasia: Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia. A large part of the political literature of five years was now completely obsolete. Reports and records of all kinds, newspapers, books, pamphlets, films, sound-tracks, photographs – all had to be rectified at lightning speed. Although no directive was ever issued, it was known that the chiefs of the Department intended that within one week no reference to the war with Eurasia, or the alliance with Eastasia, should remain in existence anywhere. (Orwell, [1948] 1981: ch. 17)

In Orwell's depiction, the government had deliberately over many years *constructed*, through extensive propaganda texts and images, a negative impression of Eurasia and a positive one of Eastasia, and this manipulation of the discourse through large-scale propaganda had apparently been largely effective. Now that the situation had changed, the entire discourse apparatus also had to be changed to create a new impression and wash away the old one.

Of course, not all texts and discourses attempt deliberately to create falsehoods in this way, but society is always to some extent involved in a struggle between competing influences, and discourse is created within that 'site of struggle'. As they did in the world of *1984*, so texts in our world play their part in the struggle between competing ideologies and points of view. This means that as discourse analysts we must be aware of how texts might be constructing biased or one-sided pictures, projecting and constructing through linguistic choices one particular viewpoint and privileging it over another.

Our fifth point of definition, then, is the fact that when analysing discourse we need to be constantly aware of how language can be used in the construction of *viewpoint* and *ideology*, sets of ideas which if they are prevalent and widespread might be treated as commonsense, but which in fact could hide aspects of power and injustice. (Ideology will be discussed further in Chapter 7.)

Socio-political dimensions

6

A number of researchers in recent years have been operating within what they call a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective (see Chapter 10). In the present series, for example, Jeffries (2010) takes a textual analysis (stylistic) approach to CDA. One impact of CDA is an enhanced awareness of the ways in which discourse is used to gain and maintain power, and is not necessarily as neutral as it might appear. To return to our earlier examples, the sign LADIES on a door, or a road sign which tells us to STOP, are placed there by some agency with power, to the extent that if a man enters the ladies' toilets, or if we fail to stop at a STOP sign, we can expect some sort of punishment or other social sanction!

This illustrates the point that not only is it important to consider the full context in which any text is interpreted (the third defining feature of discourse, as noted above) but that this must be taken to include the socio-political implications of the discourse we are studying (as Blommaert (2005) in particular has argued). Many of the language choices we make will *construct* someone or something to advantage or disadvantage, since – to borrow from the title of Dwight Bolinger's (1980) book – language is truly a 'loaded weapon'. This means that even in relatively uncontroversial areas of discourse study, there will probably be socio-political implications of one sort or another. For this reason the socio-political dimension of discourse is included as the sixth part of my definition.

2.5 A working definition of discourse

The field of discourse analysis can, in summary, be seen in terms of six defining features. To start with it considers its material or data to be:

1. Texts which are *authentic;*
2. *Texts* of any size, spoken or written.

In addition discourse analysis as I define it takes it as essential that the texts which form its subject matter be analysed in the following terms:

3. Texts are to be studied in terms of the *contexts* in which they are found, broadly conceived, as an essential dimension in their interpretation.
4. Texts are to be studied not in isolation, but in terms of their *intertextual* relations with other texts.
5. Texts are to be analysed with reference to the *ideologies and viewpoints* which underpin them.
6. Texts are to be analysed with reference to their *socio-political implications and consequences.*

2.6 Summary

This chapter used as its starting point an established definition of discourse, which was then discussed, modified, revised and augmented in the light of more recent thinking so as to offer a working idea of the scope of the discipline. The result was the six defining features of discourse set out above.

Two of these defining features were retained from the standard view, namely that discourse concerns authentic texts, considered in their contexts. Where my definition of discourse began to depart from that older view was in the third defining feature, which discarded any sense that discourse is concerned with language 'above or beyond the level of the sentence'. This was revised so as to include within our scope a wider range of texts, of all sizes. The fourth defining feature noted that intertextuality is more than simply referencing from one text to another but is an integral part of a text's creation and interpretation, and therefore should enter into a definition of discourse in a fundamental way. One reason for including intertextuality as a defining feature is in order to ensure its inclusion in any approach to analysis, so that texts are not treated as isolated separate units.

It was also noted, as the fifth defining feature, that discourse is not neutral, but serves to construct impressions of the world. This then links with the sixth feature, namely that discourse has an unavoidable socio-political dimension which must therefore equally be taken into account in any analysis. This is the corollary not only of the fifth feature, that discourse serves partly to construct the world around us ideologically, but also reflects the third feature, that discourse cannot be abstracted and extracted from its context, which includes the socio-political dimension.

These dimensions will be integrated into the method for analysing discourse to be presented in Chapter 5, but before that it is important to consider and define genre and discourse modes, to which the next chapters turn.