

Sociocultural Discourse Analysis of the “New Left” in the USA by Tom Heyden: Linguistic Characteristics and Socio-Cultural Viewpoints¹

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Abstract

Sociocultural discourse analysis is a methodology for studying the use of language for collective thinking. It was specifically designed for studying the talk of children working together in a group in a classroom, but it has also been used for studying talk amongst adults. In addition, the developing analysis was augmented by SD–informed approaches that dealt with discourse data at word-level and that looked to make apparent any patterns across the body of the discourse data. Tom Hayden was a leader of the “New Left” organization “Students for a Democratic Society” (SDS) and an author of their main document the Port-Huron Statement (1962), an anti-war activist, a defendant in the case of “Chicago Seven” in 1968, a lawmaker with 18 years of experience and an initiator of major social, interracial and economic programs, a university professor and an author of more than 20 books of articles, a member of the Advisory Council of the “Progressive Democrats of America”, belonging to the left wing of the US Democratic Party. Hayden began journalistic activities early. We conclude with some comments about the value of this methodological approach for examining professional discourse more widely.

Keywords: Sociocultural Discourse; Tom Hayden; New Left; Linguistic Characteristics; Socio-Cultural Viewpoints.

1. Introduction

Sociocultural Discourse Analysis (SCDA) is a methodology for understanding how people use talk to think together (Mercer, 2004). It is so named because it is based upon a sociocultural theory of the creation of knowledge through social interaction which has its roots in the work of Vygotsky (1978). It has been

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developed over the last twenty or so years, in the course of the Thinking Together research which has been reported quite extensively (Mercer, Dawes, Wegerif, & Sams, 2004; Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

The term ‘discourse analysis’ can be used to refer to several different approaches to analyzing language (both spoken and written) and to quite different methods. Within linguistics, its use typically indicates an interest in the organization and functions of language in use, and can be applied to research on monologist, written texts as well as on dialogue. Within sociology, psychology, anthropology and educational research, it usually refers to the analysis of talk in social context (for a fuller comparison of different types of discourse analysis, see Mercer, 2000). In sociology ‘discourse’ can also be used to refer to the general social climate of ideas associated with a topic rather than specific conversations, and so some discourse analysis may constitute a branch of cultural studies. But whilst SCDA has been informed by the work of language researchers in several disciplines, it has some distinctive characteristics.

Research into the processes of teaching, learning and cognitive development has been transformed in the last twenty years by the emergence of a theoretical perspective which is usually called 'sociocultural', but is also sometimes described as ‘socio-historical’ and (more recently) ‘cultural historical’ (Wells & Claxton, 2002; Namaziandost, Shatalebi, & Nasri, 2019). Its origins are mainly in the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural research is not a unified field, but those within it treat communication, thinking and learning as processes shaped by culture, whereby knowledge is shared and understandings are constructed by people jointly. Communicative events are shaped by cultural and historical factors, and thinking, learning and development cannot be understood without taking account of the intrinsically social and communicative nature of human life. From a sociocultural perspective, then, humans are seen as creatures who have a unique capacity for communication and whose lives are normally led within groups, communities and societies based on shared ‘ways with words’, ways of thinking, social practices and tools for getting things done. Education is seen as a dialogic process, with students and teachers working within settings which reflect the values and social practices of schools as cultural institutions. A sociocultural perspective highlights the possibility that educational success and failure may be explained by the quality of educational dialogue, rather than simply considering the capability of individual students or the skill of their teachers. It encourages the investigation of the relationship between language and thinking and also of the relationship between what Vygotsky (1978) called the ‘intermental’ and the ‘intramental’ – the social and the psychological – in the processes of learning, development and intellectual endeavor.

Many human activities involve not just the sharing of information and the coordination of social interaction, but also a joint, dynamic engagement with ideas amongst partners. When working together, we do not only interact, we ‘interthink’

(Mercer, 2000). Some sociocultural researchers have investigated how, in particular encounters or through a series of related encounters, two or more people use language to combine their intellectual resources in the pursuit of a common task. Good examples would include Middleton and Edwards' (1990) study of collective remembering, Elbers' (1994) research on children's play and that of O'Connor and Michaels (1996) on the orchestration of classroom group discussions. Discourse analysts of other theoretical persuasions, such as conversation analysts, have also studied the processes of joint intellectual activity. However, few researchers have tried to relate the content, quality and temporal nature of dialogue during joint activities to outcomes such as the success or failure of problem solving, or to specific learning gains for participants (a notable exception being the work of Kumpulainen and Wray (2002). Yet the relationship of dialogue processes to outcomes is of crucial interest, with possible practical implications not only in educational settings.

Studying the joint construction of knowledge can also tell us more about the nature of spoken language, because such joint knowledge-building is an essential requirement of conversational interaction. Conversations are founded on the establishment of a base of common knowledge and necessarily involve the creation of more shared understanding. Conversational partners use language to travel together from the past into the future, mutually transforming the current state of their understanding of the topic(s) of their conversation. To do so, they need to build a contextual foundation for the progress of their talk, and talk is also the prime means for building that contextual foundation. Gee and Green (1998) refer to this aspect of language use as 'reflexivity'. If one is interested in how talk is used to enable joint intellectual activity, one must be concerned with the ways that shared knowledge is both invoked and created in dialogue. This concern was central in the development of the methodology I describe here, especially in the earliest stages when Derek Edwards and I were working on the research reported in the book *Common Knowledge* (Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Namaziandost, Neisi, Kheryadi, & Nasri, 2019).

Thomas Emmet Hayden was born on December 11, 1939 in Detroit, Michigan (Sale, 1973), in a working family of an Irish origin and was an only child. His parents, father John Hayden, a former marine, worked at Chrysler Corporation as an accountant and his mother, librarian Genevieve Hayden, divorced when his son turned 10; Tom stayed with his mother (Browne Blaine, 2007). A clever boy attended a Catholic parish school where he read Holy Scripture aloud to nuns and "learned to fear the hell" (Gable, 2018; Wyrasti et al., 2019).

In Dondero high school Hayden edited a school newspaper and when in his farewell column (Gable, 2018) after cutting down the first letters of paragraphs the phrase "Go to hell" came out, he was forbidden to attend the graduation ceremony, and he individually received a diploma (Gable, 2018). Hayden began to think about a career as a foreign correspondent while still at school but became more interested

in social reforms after joining the University of Michigan in 1957. While studying at the university, Tom demonstrated excellent success and became the editor of the student newspaper “The Michigan Daily”. He received a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1961 and worked there from 1962 to 1963.

2. Methods

Hayden’s political career began at the university, but as a radical anti-war activist and civil rights activist, he became known in the 1960s. His turn to radical politics began after a meeting with M.L. King in California in the summer of 1960. Hayden joined the protest actions of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and voter registration in the south (Gable, 2018).

On his 22nd birthday, Hayden was arrested in Albany (Ga.), when he and a group of black the Riders of Freedom students-activists were driving from Atlanta and ignored an order to leave the bus for white people. He was jailed for blocking a sidewalk on the bus arrival in Albany (Gable, 2018; Soleimani & Esfahani, 2018).

“For those who have not gone through the experience of the struggle for civil rights in the South, a deliberate sending to prison may seem an act of endless despair” (Hayden, 1988), - wrote Hayden in his memoirs. “But this is not so, since it was a necessary moral act and ritual of transition to a serious political life” (Hayden, 1988).

Dissatisfied with the conformity of existing student organizations, perceiving the need for a national student organization to coordinate civil rights projects across the country, Tom and 35 his like-minded people created the organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (Woo, 2016) based on the Student League of Industrial Democracy (SLID) in 1960-1961 in Ann Arbor.

At the end of 1961, he accepted the offer of SDS founder Alan Haber to become a field secretary in the South. Hayden himself was elected as a president of the SDS and headed it from 1962 to 1963 (Sale, 1973), but after his resignation he retained influential positions in the organization and had a hand in the implementation of numerous programs both with and without the participation of SDS.

For example, Hayden helped to form an important social project of economic research and action (ERAP) (Economic Research and Action Project ERAP Newsletter, 1965), designed to stimulate the progress of civil rights.

3. Results and Discussion

SCDA is underpinned by a thematic framework that makes it relevant for studying how talk-based classroom learning interactions work. This framework distinguishes SCDA from other forms of discourse analysis by its particular interest in four themes that are of particular interest to sociocultural theorists. SCDA focuses on lexical content and the cohesive structures of talk that are utilized by participants

interacting in a specific cultural context (e.g., a workplace). It is also specifically interested in how shared understanding is developed in social context and over time (Mercer, 2008) as well as being concerned with the impact of talk. SCDA also accentuates that way that discourse is used to pursue joint intellectual activity or ‘interthinking’ (Littleton & Mercer, 2013; Namaziandost, Sabzevari, & Hashemifardnia, 2018). A study using a SCDA approach therefore needs to gather evidence about discourse in four areas:

- Content – gathering evidence about the lexical content and the cohesive structures of discourse;
- Time - gathering evidence about how shared understanding is developed in social context over time;
- Joint Intellectual Action - gathering evidence about how participants recognize the thinking of other participants and use this to coordinate shared understandings;
- Impact - gathering evidence about the effect that discourse has on the cognition and behavior of the participants (Abedi, Namaziandost, & Akbari, 2019).

Whilst this thematic framework makes SCDA applicable to talk-based classroom learning interactions, the underlying themes have generic qualities which make them of potential use for other learning contexts and for other forms of interaction (e.g. non-talk-based interaction contexts). At the same time, the process of translating the themes to a different (e.g. a non-talk based) learning context has implications for the evidence gathering methods used. In other words, it is important that the method employed to capture evidence about the four SCDA themes are attuned to the discourse context under study.

The most important merit of the first period of Hayden’s political biography is the fact that he has become one of the first American “New Left” practitioners and theorists of “participatory democracy”, the author of the SDS program document the “Port Huron Statement” (The Port Huron Statement, 1962) whose project he wrote while being imprisoned in Albany (Ga.). This document of 25,000 words became the manifesto of the organization after it was discussed, revised and officially adopted at the first congress of the organization in Port Huron (Michigan) in 1962. Its goal was to create an interracial, multicultural and egalitarian society (Brick, 2018).

The Port Huron Statement was not only the first document of the rising student movement in the country. The basic principles of the movement of the "new left" were firstly formulated in it (Parker & Brick, 2015).

In general, the Hayden project was a fiasco, because after two years of its implementation, the ghetto of Newark was burned, unarmed people were finished in the streets, the prospects for reform were lost and the social reformism of the War on Poverty course was curtailed. Hayden himself witnessed the collapse of his hopes during violent riots, robberies and destruction which killed 26 people and injured

hundreds (Miller & Miller, 1994). Experience led him to write the book "Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response " (1967) (Hayden).

When the Vietnam War ended and the idealism of the 1960s gradually evaporated, Hayden finally settled in California, began a new phase of his life and moved from ardent activism to progressive legislation, and realized himself as a writer, politician and family man. In 1971, Hayden said that he turned his eyes on politics as the country began electoral reform, public opinion turned against Vietnam and 18-year-olds reached voting status.

4. Conclusions

A characteristic of SCDA is the iterative investigation of the particular and general features of interaction. In real terms this means that the analytical structure for enquiry is aimed at both the level of 'exchange' and the level of 'utterance and word'. This multi-level approach to enquiry allows the social intentions and purposes of interaction to be considered alongside its structural organization. SCDA is also tied to the context of the enquiry, meaning that the methods employed need to cohere with the setting in which interaction is being studied so as to evidence content, chronology, joint interaction, and impact elements. The examiner feedback context shares a number of features with other learning contexts that legitimize the importance of studying participant interaction (e.g. it is structured around formalized episodes of interaction that aspire to attaining a common shared understanding, and it is driven by differences in the knowledge states of the participants). The use of a mixture of methods can help an analyst to explore a phenomenon from a number of angles (e.g. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), so long as such methods are based on a common methodological perspective that allows them to complement each other and to compensate for each other's limitations (Johnson, 2017; Abedi, Keshmirshakan, & Namaziandost, 2019).

Hayden died on October 23, 2016 in Santa Monica Hospital, where he was hospitalized with a stroke in 2015. His wife, Barbara Williams, said that he had a heart attack in July 2016.

Hayden's personal archive, covering his life since the 1960s, was transferred in 2014 to the University of Michigan. Many of those with whom he walked through life responded to the death of the politician. He was "the most influential politician who came out of the new left ... one of the few people I knew who really wanted to rule and loved power," said Todd Gitlin, a sociologist from Columbia University who replaced Hayden as the president of SDS (Gitlin, 2016).

It is worth reiterating that the extended temporality of this type of working discourse is a key feature of its functional nature. the process of examiner discourse involves different phases of communication, so that monologue by a speaker at one time may be vital for providing information which, by becoming a shared resource for both

participants, enables their later coordinated thinking (Mercer, 2008). In a very broad sense, through using language in the ways we have described, these examiners were able not just to interact, but to ‘interthink’ (Littleton & Mercer, 2013). Various methods for studying interactive language use also address these concerns, but we suggest that the methodology we have described here enables ways of communicating to be related to thinking processes and to outcomes in a more precise and insightful manner. In this way, we can examine what is achieved through involvement in collective thinking activity – and perhaps offer constructive advice about how discussions like those illustrated here can be made more effective.

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