

**AN ANALYSIS OF HOW THE SENIOR CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATION CONSTRUCTS THE LANGUAGE
NEEDS OF ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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by

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Abstract

The Senior Certificate (SC) examination, a focus of the research described in this thesis, has an important function in terms of the quality of the education system overall and also in terms of the contribution of education to the achievement of national goals. The SC examination functions i) as a measure of achievement at school ii) as an indicator of work readiness and iii) as an indicator of the potential to succeed in higher education. This thesis offers a critique of the SC examination in respect of its functions.

The way in which learners' language related needs are constructed is crucial in discussing the SC examination's legitimacy since perceptions about the needs of learners are reflected in what is taught and assessed. Since the majority of candidates writing the SC examination do so using a language which is not their mother tongue, the research described in the thesis attempted to identify the way in which the English second language (ESL) SC examination papers construct learners' needs.

Examination papers represent a particular domain of social practice and are constructed through discourse. In the context of the research described in this thesis, discourses are understood as sets of ideas which are shared by communities of people and which give rise to practices which then define and sustain those communities and, thus, the discourses themselves. Discourse is language insofar as it converges with power and positions people in the interests of power.

The ideological nature of discourse necessitates a critical orientation to research which interrogates, challenges and critiques the status quo. To identify the discourses constructing ESL learners' needs I conducted a critical discourse analysis on a representative sample of ESL SC examination papers and also interviewed six ESL examiners to corroborate the findings of the analysis. This then allowed me to identify several dominant discourses constructing ESL learners' needs: meaning-related, literature-related and process-related. The first meaning-related discourse, 'Received Tradition' discourse, focuses on the rules of grammar and spelling. Rather than approaching language as a resource to enable learners to understand the ideas to which they are exposed, learners are being taught discrete 'skills' to equip them for higher education study and the workplace. It is argued that school-based language literacy practices are not generalizable to the workplace and to higher education.

Another aspect of 'Received Tradition' discourse holds that the study of English literature is a medium for understanding life and that there is moral value in teaching English literature. Learners are therefore constructed as lacking these values and their needs as having to acquire them. 'Received Tradition' discourse also overlaps with a second meaning-related discourse, 'Autonomous Text' discourse, which holds that the text's meaning is explicit and that if the learners can manipulate the rules of English grammar, 'have' vocabulary and can spell, they can retrieve meanings from texts they encounter in a wide range of contexts and construct texts for themselves. It is argued that a lack of awareness that meaning is constructed through recourse to other contexts, texts and the learner's experience is disadvantaging ESL candidates. 'Language as an Instrument of Communication' discourse, the last meaning-related discourse identified, sees language as the vehicle used to convey ideas, thoughts, information and beliefs, which are viewed as having been constructed independently of language. It is assumed that the answers, which, according to 'Autonomous Text' discourse, are in the text, can be conveyed if the tools of language are used correctly.

The first literature-related discourse identified is 'Literature Study Develops Language Proficiency'. It is argued this is a misperception since language is learned as part of situated practice and instruction must thus be embedded in meaningful communicative contexts involving situated practice. The second literature-related discourse identified, 'Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life', is connected to the 'Received Tradition' discourse referred to above which holds that there is moral value in teaching English literature. This research identifies the ideological implications of these discourses, arguing that values are culture-specific and learners from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds experience life differently from the way it is depicted in English literature.

Process-related discourses, which are part of the processes of teaching and assessment, concern the inadequacy of the ESL learner and of the markers and therefore dictate what can and cannot be expected of ESL learners in the SC examination. The research showed how all of the above discourses work through the SC curriculum to impose the values and beliefs of particular dominant groups on the ESL learner. Because of the robust and invidious nature of discourses this is a cause for concern.

Although it is difficult to set a school leaving examination which serves both workplace and academic functions, there is a need to move beyond traditional,

hegemonic approaches to understanding language learning. This thesis offers an analysis which can be used to inform practice.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

1994 was a watershed year in South Africa as the black majority went to the polls for the first time. Once elected, the new democratic government inherited a system that was elitist and fragmented. Owing to the unequal allocation of funds and the divisions in the education system under apartheid, white students had been served better than their black (and 'coloured'¹) counterparts in a myriad ways. The new government thus put an impressive legislative framework in place in order to achieve a comprehensive reform of schooling which would redress the injustices of the past.

In the early 1990s the focus was on achieving equity in the system. By the mid-1990s, however, South Africa was embracing a rapidly globalizing economy and the concomitant need to become part of a global "knowledge society" (Griesel 2000). In terms of education, therefore, the system - at all levels - was being called upon to be in line with education systems elsewhere in the industrialized world (Gultig 2000) and to produce learners with the skills which would allow the country to compete in a global market. Prinsloo (2000: 112) observes that policy documents reflect a "correlation between literacy and productivity... under the... 'human capital' metaphor". This imperative necessitated massification of education and a concomitant broadening of the social base of learners at the higher levels of the system. Since massified systems are, by definition, differentiated systems (Reddy 2004), policy development was aimed at ensuring equity, diversifying learner profiles and creating the conditions needed for massification.

This chapter outlines the reform framework in the context of the "slippage" (Kraak 2001), noted above, from an equity to an efficiency agenda in educational policy from the mid 1990s onwards. Thereafter, it positions the Senior Certificate (SC) examination, which is the focus of the study described in this thesis, in relation to elements of the reform framework such as the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the introduction of outcomes based education (OBE). The chapter explores the purposes and some of the shortcomings of the examination in

¹ Throughout the thesis I have used single inverted commas as 'scare quotes' and double inverted commas when citing a source.

this national context and introduces the National Senior Certificate (NSC), the new examination set to replace the current Senior Certificate in 2008. The chapter then locates the research problem forming the basis of this study before explaining the organization and subsequent chapters of the thesis

1.2 Educational Reform: Policies and Frameworks

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (ANC 1994), proposed by the ANC as part of the policy proposals which were to bring the party to victory in South Africa's first democratic elections, focused on growth through redistribution. This included restructuring the financial sector to direct resources for infrastructural development, targeting foreign investment to key economic areas, stimulating the economy and creating jobs through unbundling large corporations into small and medium-sized competitive enterprises, and facilitating the trade unions' role in developing policy (Reddy 2004). In the face of globalization, the business sector contended that this was socialist and would lead to economic disaster (Reddy 2004; Terreblanche 2002). It therefore advocated drastically reducing the state's role, privatizing state assets, pleasing investors by reducing the strength of trade unions and reconfiguring the education system to provide the skills needed in the labour market (Reddy 2004).

In 1996 when the value of the South African rand fell in relation to that of the US dollar and there was a growing deficit in the balance of trade account (Heintz 1997), the government shifted position and, in 1998, announced its Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy (GEAR) (ANC 1998) which changed macroeconomic policy in order to encourage foreign investment and the export of South African goods. This policy saw redistribution as a by-product of economic growth rather than integral to economic strategy. GEAR opened up the South African economy to global markets, reduced or dropped tariffs protecting South African goods and allowed easier movement of goods and currency into and out of the country (Reddy 2004). It aimed at strict fiscal discipline, promoting efficiency and a leaner and more professional public service (Cloete, Pillay, Badat & Moja 2004). It is argued (among others by Osborn 1997 & Heintz 1997) that in pursuing its bias towards economic growth through capital-intensive industry, GEAR, which is still in operation today, is reducing employment and wage income. Reddy (2004) holds that GEAR requires the South African labour market to become more flexible in the sense that labour is more transferable through being easily dismissed and re-hired to increase labour productivity (cf. also Prinsloo 2000: 115-116). However, this has led to reductions in

staff and replacement of workers with more capital-intensive machinery rather than increases in growth and employment (Heintz 1997). The more open market has left the most vulnerable poor and working class sector without the technical skills that the intensely disputed 'new' economy values; skills, supposedly easily transferable from one job to another (Reddy 2004; Prinsloo 2000).

For Dale (1989) the need to provide the space for capitalist expansion while at the same time ensuring the social conditions which will allow capitalist expansion to take place, constitutes a dynamic within capitalist societies which needs to be managed through the development of policy. In South Africa, the need to create the conditions for capitalist expansion has benefited the historically privileged classes, the majority of whites and a rising black middle class (Terreblanche 2002). According to the World Bank (2000), experience in Africa has shown that poor people in rural areas engaged in subsistence farming or other survivalist economic activities, and households where the head is unemployed do not benefit from expansionist policy, and open markets and free trade have been shown to exacerbate the marginalization of the majority of Africa's people (Pennycook 2003; Taylor & Nel 2002; Castells 2001a.).

Over the last decade education policy has reflected the state's dilemma in attempting to balance the need for both capitalist accumulation and social reproduction. One of the most significant attempts to do this was the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA) (Act No.58 of 1995), which established a single, integrated, outcomes-based National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF is a structure onto which all qualifications ('formal', workplace or community based) can be registered. They are located within three 'bands': a General Education and Training (GET) band, a Further Education and Training (FET) band (the exit point of this band at present is the SC examination) and a Higher Education and Training (HET) band. These three bands are further described in terms of eight levels. A new 'NQF-friendly' curriculum for general education, Curriculum 2005, was also instituted.

The aim is thus for all qualifications in both education and training to exist on a single qualifications ladder (the NQF) with equivalent exit points at different levels. Learners can move across and up the framework regardless of the place, length of time and context of learning. In other words, the system allows portability of qualifications vertically across the three bands and horizontally across the fields which comprise the education and training system. The NQF structure makes it possible for learners to have small units of learning "banked" (Boughey 2003) until they have enough units

to achieve a more significant qualification. Moreover, being able to describe a level of the framework makes it possible to describe the level of a qualification registered there which will help to address the issue of standardizing quality across levels and within bands (Boughey 2003).

Equivalence is thus one of the goals that registering qualifications on the NQF is intended to achieve. This is also important because of the 'foreign' qualifications brought back by students who study abroad and those offered by overseas institutions operating within South Africa's borders. For example, Monash, an Australian university, has opened a campus in Gauteng.

The NQF aims to contribute to lifelong learning - termed 'development'. This aim acknowledges that learning should not be limited to formal education. Kolb (1984) views life-long learning as the adaptations one has to make to one's total life situation, since the individual lives in a series of situations. Lifelong learning is seen as necessary for the career shifts that the changing economic environment necessitates. According to Castells (2001c.), success in the "network society" depends on learning how to learn and relearn, and to continual access to new knowledge and training.

Reform of the educational system has also involved the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms at all levels of the NQF. Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, was established in terms of the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act (Act 58 of 2001), and thus became responsible for the quality of the SC examination. Since the SC examination has an important function in terms of the quality of the education system overall and also in terms of the contribution of education to the achievement of national goals, an evaluation of the examination in the context of the new reform framework was clearly necessary (Umalusi 2004).

1.2.1 Framework and shortcomings of the SC

The SC is a remnant of the education system pre 1994 and, as already noted, is in the process of being replaced by the National Senior Certificate (NSC). The SC marks the culmination of 12 years of schooling. During the apartheid era it was administered by the racially and ethnically segregated departments of education. Between 1990 and 2000 the SC examination papers were set and administered provincially; however, since 2001 six subjects have been set nationally. These six

nationally set subjects include English as a second language, the subject which is the focus of the research described in this thesis.

To obtain a SC, a candidate must pass at least five instructional offerings, including two languages. Since South Africa has eleven official languages, papers are offered in all languages at both first and second language levels. Candidates must pass one of the papers at first language level and another at second language level. Although the offerings include watch making, bricklaying and plastering, building construction, lithographical printing, motor vehicle construction, television and radiotricians work, most public schools do not offer this variety of subjects. Learners usually have to choose from among traditional subjects such as mathematics, biology, physical science, economics, geography, history and accounting. However, in recent years public schools have also begun to offer more specialized subjects such as drama and tourism.

To qualify to enter higher education, certain SC examination criteria must be met. Candidates who meet these requirements are then described as achieving SC 'endorsement'. A distinction is made between passing subjects on the higher grade (HG), or on the less demanding standard grade (SG). For SC endorsement a candidate must pass at least six instructional offerings including two languages at HG level. Since South African universities currently use only English or Afrikaans as languages of instruction, this means that a pass must be obtained in one of these two subjects at HG level. Three other subjects must also be passed at HG. A large percentage of learners at SC level follow a curriculum that is geared towards fulfilling the endorsement requirements. SC endorsement requirements place the emphasis on academic subjects and the curriculum is dictated by these requirements, although they may neither be sufficiently appropriate to develop those skills that are necessary for success in academic study at university, nor for the world of work. However, this seems to be changing. Umalusi (2004) found that in 2003 only 30% of candidates wrote the HG examination, which suggests that the remaining 70% were not seeking endorsement. This would appear to be in line with national goals for participation in higher education. In South Africa, approximately 17% of the 18-24 year old cohort currently enter higher education with a goal of 20% participation set for 2010 (DoE 2001).

Notwithstanding the fall in the number of candidates seeking endorsement, the SC is a 'high stakes' examination that serves three purposes: it provides access to university, acts as an indicator of performance at school in that it is a school leaving

certificate and is also an employment screening mechanism. However, it has been criticized as not fulfilling any of these purposes. As already noted, fewer than twenty percent of the more than half a million learners who annually enroll to write the SC examination achieve endorsement (South African University Vice Chancellor's Association (SAUVCA) 1999). Furthermore, many of those who do so are totally unprepared for HE (Department of Education 1998). Yeld's (2003) research shows that even the most selective of tertiary institutions are admitting a significant number of students whose levels of performance are alarmingly low, notwithstanding the SAUVCA Task Team's (1999) recommendation that entrants to HE institutions should be able to 'prove' that they have cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins & Swain 1983) in the medium of instruction used at the university at which they want to study. Yeld's research was based on several years of data analysis of the results of a set of scholastic achievement tests (SATS) that assessed target language ability and the academic literacy of students from both historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions.

Although admissions testing is a widely used alternative to admission to HE on the basis of SC endorsement results, the 'backwash' effect of these tests on curricula is not strong enough to ameliorate the problems of access. The SC examination influences what and how teachers teach. If educators teach towards the SC examination, alternative admissions testing cannot alter candidates' level of proficiency; it can only capture that which has already been developed (Griesel 2000). As Killen and Hattingh (2004) point out, moreover, a particular educator's idea of what it means to 'understand' will influence the way that person tries to help learners to understand and how they will attempt to assess their learners' 'understanding'.

As a university screening mechanism, the SC is "only effective as a predictor of success among high scoring students" (SAQA 2001: 10). Moreover, the curriculum that has been followed is not particularly appropriate for study at tertiary institutions other than universities. The SC endorsement requirements are not designed to create coherent qualifications for access to HE in the broader sense (Department of Education 1998). The system thus detracts from the value of learning achieved at any other site of learning in the HET band. This means that the vast majority of the population is not prepared to pursue studies in higher education, which, at this particular level, defeats the government's aim of promoting lifelong learning.

Although the SC serves as an employment screening mechanism, the curriculum that has been followed is not particularly appropriate for the world of work (SAQA 2001). It does not address work-related competencies and is not perceived by employers as a particularly good indicator of success (Department of Education 1998). It is assumed that 'success' here means success in finding a job. The DoE (1998: 20) also recognizes the need to provide employers, HE institutions and learners themselves with publicly recognized, reliable information on their knowledge, competencies and performance, at the point at which they enter the labour market as qualified work-seekers. Although it is felt that adequate throughputs from the school system are necessary to address the equity, human resource and labour needs of the country (Griesel & Pokpas 2003), the SC endorsement requirements are not designed to create coherent qualifications for access to careers (SAQA 2001).

The FETC² Policy Document (SAQA 2001) highlights certain other deficiencies in the SC. Firstly, the SC has been criticized for demanding simple rote learning at SG level and for emphasizing academic theory rather than practical competence at HG level (Department of Education 1998). It has also been criticized for separating theory and practice, giving rise to "irrelevant [HE] programmes that fail to meet the needs of learners and the changing demands of the economy and society" thus leading to high unemployment levels (*ibid.*). In this regard, the South African Vice Chancellor's Association (SAUVCA) was advised to encourage its members to revisit current programmes to make them more relevant to national needs (*ibid.*) Secondly, the SC is said to inhibit learner mobility across programmes and institutions in further and higher education since it provides mechanisms for vertical but not lateral movement. Since the examination does not have the capacity to recognize previous achievement (largely because of its reliance on schooling rather than learning) it is criticized for being inefficient and wasteful.

As a result of the perceived inadequacies of the SC, SAUVCA formed a task team in 1998 to advise the then Matriculation Board on restructuring the SC into a new examination. An outcomes-based system of education acknowledges the need to openly state the learning assumed to be in place before commencement of study towards a particular qualification. However, an SC endorsement identifies learners

² The National Senior Certificate (NSC) referred to earlier in this chapter was formerly known as the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) – hence the reference to the FETC Policy Document.

for further study on the basis of criteria largely based on general achievement and not on achievement of specific learning outcomes within a particular field of learning. The new NSC reflects the NQF's outcomes-based approach to education and training in that it is intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence to facilitate the transition from school to work and with a basis for further learning. Applied competence means the ability to put into practice in the relevant context the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification (SAQA 2001). Since those contexts will include both study and work-based situations, this means that the qualification must be diverse enough to give it a broad "exchange value" ("an enabling participation in a wide range of learning and qualifications") and specific enough to make it immediately useful in a specific context ("use value") (SAQA 2001: 5). It remains to be seen what requirements will be necessary to accommodate these two different aspects in a single school-leaving certificate intended to serve the social and economic needs of the South African society.

To obtain a NSC a candidate will be required to pass two official languages, one at home language level (with a pass set at 40%) and the other at first additional language level (with a pass set at 30%). One of these languages must be the language of teaching and learning (LOLT). The candidate will also be required to pass Mathematics or Mathematics Literacy, Life Orientation and three other subjects making a total of seven subjects. SG / HG subject differentiation will no longer apply (Amoore, Griesel & Pityana 2003). The NSC replaces the SC as exit qualification in 2008 (DoE 2005).

The NQF field that specifically concerns the research described in this thesis is Communication Studies and Language: 20 credits of a NSC qualification must be in this field and may be obtained in one of South Africa's eleven official languages. Another 16 compulsory credits must be from the field of Mathematics. It is believed that these two areas of learning provide the key to further learning and bring coherence to the NSC qualification (SAQA 2001). The emphasis on language is reflected in the fact that in restructuring the SC, universities generally agreed that entrants to HE institutions should be able to 'prove' that they have cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins & Swain 1983) in the university medium of instruction, although it is not yet clear whether 20 credits will be sufficient to address this need (SAQA 2001). It is feared that schools will prepare learners for a pass in the NSC rather than admission to and success in HE (Amoore *et al* 2003).

Therefore HE institutions are designing a benchmark test, which it is hoped will be able to indicate CALP reliably.

The prominence of the language issue is also reflected in the fact that as a precursor to measures taken to enhance the NSC, the language examination papers in the SC were subjected to a standardization process.

1.2.1.1 Standardization of the language examination papers

As part of the reform process, in 1998, the Department of Education recommended that assessment of all South African languages be standardized across the examining boards so that all languages at first and second language level are examined “in a comparable way in terms of critical thinking skills and internal language components” (DoE 1998). It is questionable whether, from a practical point of view, this recommendation can be implemented. In the case of the English Second Language (ESL) literature paper (Paper 2), for example, nine different sets of examination papers (each set comprises both a HG and a SG paper) are compiled by nine or more different examiners (many papers are set by two or more examiners). Since generalized descriptions/criteria for ‘critical thinking skills’ and ‘internal language components’ have not been developed the standardization process is bound to be fraught with difficulty. The term ‘critical’ can mean many things to different people and Janks (2001), for example, shows the limited way in which language and power is understood in Curriculum 2005 by referring to documents of the Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development (GICD) and the *Standards for Language and Communication ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) Level 4*, January 1999 (<http://www.saqqa.org.za>). The descriptors and indicators in these documents focus on critical awareness of the way in which language is used manipulatively to stereotype, influence and persuade, but neglect to foster an understanding of the “constructed and constructive nature of all texts”, nor how when learners produce their own texts this is also at play (Janks 2001: 243).

According to Edelsky (1996), tests incorporate the wrong assumptions about education, one of which is that they themselves can be standardized. Since there is no such thing as a ‘standard’ situation, Edelsky (1996: 169) refutes the notion that tests can be standardized, arguing that candidates interpret item content differently, differ in ‘proper’ attitudes towards answering and to the impact of their “particular personal histories on any aspect of taking a test”. Overlooking the difficulties of standardization in a country like South Africa which is socially and culturally so

diverse is related to the perception that a text is autonomous of its context (cf. chap 2: 2.2.3 and chap 4: 4.3.1.3) and that meaning can be extracted from a text to allow the candidate to answer the question. This view is opposed by that which perceives meaning making as dependent on socio-cultural context (Halliday 1978). In these circumstances, the construct of standardization itself is highly problematic.

Notwithstanding, 'standardization' of the SC examination was implemented in the form of standardization of structure (cf. 4.2.1 where the format of the examination papers is explained). Other standardization requirements (applicable to the SC examination generally) are that content coverage must be in line with the requirements of the relevant syllabi and guideline documents and that there must be regularity in administration of the examination to ensure that all candidates write under the same conditions. Other standardization requirements relate to the need to differentiate between HG and SG, although it is acknowledged that this distinction itself is problematic and needs to be better conceptualized in the NSC (Umalusi 2004).

Another 'standardization' practice focuses on adjusting (rationalizing) the overall marks of the SC examination – referred to as "statistical moderation". This includes continuous assessment (CASS) marks since continuous assessment, in the form of a portfolio, now comprises part of the examination process for the languages. Condoning marks are 'given' to candidates who need a few additional marks to pass a subject and a 5% language compensation mark goes to those candidates who speak English as an additional language (that is, who offer an African language as their first language) and who write the content subject papers (for example, history) in their second language. However, the Summary Report on the Evaluation of the Senior Certificate Examination (Umalusi 2004) reveals that the competency levels of ESL candidates who receive compensation marks have not improved over the last seven years, since they are receiving lower results than their peers in other subjects. Furthermore, notwithstanding the compensation mark, overall their results are significantly lower than those of other candidates.

Standardization also takes into account whether the standard of a paper was too high or too low in comparison with papers of the past three years. Umalusi has been criticized for contributing to the inflation of the pass rate which rose in 2003 to 73% - an increase of 26% over a six-year period (Umalusi 2004). Umalusi's research into the standard of the SC examination identified the increasing number of students writing the examination on standard grade as the key factor accounting for the

improvement in the pass rate (*ibid.*). In 2003 only 30% of candidates wrote the examination on higher grade, which means that 70% wrote it on SG. Of those who wrote it on HG, only 18,2% passed. SAUVCA has declared that the school system is failing the HE system because of the declining number of learners obtaining SC endorsement passes and the poor quality of learners with HG passes in mathematics and physical science.

Referring specifically to the English Second Language (ESL) examination Paper 1, Umalusi (2004: 7) found that the paper “is becoming easier” with a “seeming fall in the number of questions designed to operate at more challenging levels”. Umalusi concludes that the content of the ESL curriculum and assessment practices at SC level for this subject are singularly inappropriate for preparing students for the study of other subjects. In addition, cognitive and proficiency demands in ESL are low. By way of illustration of some of the points made above it is worth referring to the remarks made by one of the examiners interviewed as part of the research which led to this thesis (Examiner B). According to the examiner, the paper must take into account “the previously disadvantaged students, that it won’t be so overwhelming that they get 0 out of 80”. Examiner B felt that the gap between the previously disadvantaged students and those who had not been disadvantaged is widening. This examiner explained that in an effort to accommodate the different levels of ability of candidates it was difficult to set a paper “in which the standard is uniform” (p.7³). This latter comment supports the argument that standardization of form does not take into account standardization of difficulty.

Reform of the SC examination and ‘standardization’ of language assessment has not remedied the problem that students are educationally underprepared for HE; evidenced by the low throughput rates at all HE institutions and the increasing proportion of students obtaining results in the 50-54% range (Griesel & Pokpas 2003). As noted above, the difficulties experienced by ESL students at tertiary level are often viewed as language-related. The *Language Policy for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education 2002: 4) states: “Language has been and continues to be a barrier to access and success in higher education”. One solution, according to the Department of Education, is to develop students’ proficiency in English (and Afrikaans). According to Boughey (2002), Alexander (2000) and Christie (1989),

³ Page numbers relate to the page of the interview transcript.

among others, the problems experienced by students as they engage with tertiary study are not only related to language issues. Naming the students' problems as language problems and then developing programmes and methods to remediate these problems (which are also related to discourse) will not facilitate access to higher education (Boughey 2002).

The diverse learning experiences of learners as well as contrasting constructs of literacy and language proficiency, all of which contribute to the difficulties learners experience at the FET interface, will now be elaborated on.

1.2.2 Diverse constructs of language and learning

Although it is argued that younger people are receiving much better schooling than their parents, there are still vast disparities in educational provision in South Africa. Rural schools are often without water, sanitation, electricity, a telephone, a library, a workshop or a laboratory. There is low teacher morale across the system and learners and teachers in many schools are vulnerable to gang violence, drugs and vandalism indicating a general lack of security. Student counseling is often non-existent and ill-discipline on the part of principals, teachers and learners widespread. School hours are often irregular and the lack of effective management skills within the education system are paralleled by the presence of inefficiency and corruption (Israel 2000; Prinsloo 2000). In addition, poverty, deprivation and ill health (*Emerging Voices* 2005; Terreblanche 2002) all take their toll on the quality of teaching and learning.

Although learner profiles were very well defined before 1994, the advent of democracy has meant that student populations are increasingly diverse in terms of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and also in terms of their level of preparedness. Up until 1994 the SA education system presupposed a certain level of general knowledge (background knowledge) among candidates, and general knowledge is not a-cultural. In other words, background knowledge differs from one candidate to another. In the Western school system a certain type of cultural knowledge dominates. Because of the diversity of the student population some students may have a "low store" of this "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Cultural capital is defined by Wood (2003:62) as those "cognitive resources that have been informally acquired through one's upbringing, life experiences and exposure to learning situations in recreation and hobbies". Education favours the dominant culture – confirms, legitimates and reproduces it – and devalues subordinate

cultures. Those learners who lack this 'school culture' (because they have not acquired it from their families) are disadvantaged (Gibson 1986). Their everyday knowledge and linguistic style become marginal and inferior in contrast with school knowledge and language, or as Christie (1989: 24) explains, "...do not so successfully serve functions relevant to school learning". Moreover, school enables members of the dominant culture to accumulate more cultural capital; in this way education favours the already favoured (Gibson 1986). Another factor compounding the problem is that research (Olson & Astington 1993) has shown that learners respect dominant cultural knowledge (the official view) and have a lack of respect for their own beliefs.

At tertiary level although students may have a rich experience of life, they find that this experience is not counted as academically relevant. In addition, most HE programmes require much stronger performance than at the FET level and single out performance in the so-called 'gateway subjects' (English, Science, Mathematics) as an indication of the likely success of students (Griesel & Pokpas 2003).

Braverman (1974) suggests that the school imparts the minimum requirements for 'functioning' in a modern urban environment (note the connection with functional literacy) – both as workers and consumers – and that the child and adolescent practice what they will later be called upon to do as adults. The child must adapt to a "speedy and intricate social machinery" that "dictates the rounds of production, consumption, survival and amusement" (Braverman 1974: 287). What the child 'learns' is not as important as what s/he becomes wise to. This is an alternative or additional perspective on cultural capital.

Other explanations have been offered for the 'gap' between academic proficiency at secondary and tertiary levels. Bowles and Gintis (1976: 132) argue that "vocational and general levels emphasize rule following and close supervision" while at tertiary level there is a more open atmosphere emphasizing "the internalization of norms" – what Kuhn (1969 cited In Bowles & Gintis 1976) terms "self-directedness". Another explanation is that learners at secondary level have different perspectives on text literacy. Whereas at tertiary level students are expected to use other texts to challenge meanings in one text and arrive at understandings, this is not common practice at school where the authority of the text is not questioned (Geisler 1994) (cf. chap 2: 2.2.1). Furthermore, at school many teachers feel constrained to teach for the examination (Israel 2000), so what learners are taught is to pass an examination. Inadequate approaches to assessment exclude many students whose abilities,

according to Williams (2005), remain undiscovered. In addition, teachers at many schools teach in the pupils' home language, yet assessment is conducted predominantly in English. Other factors that have been 'blamed' for the poor SC results are teacher shortages, factors relating to composition and marking of the examination (cf. chap 4: 4.3.1.1) and poor language use in schools.

The Report of the Ministerial Investigation into the Senior Certificate (DoE 1998) emphasizes the importance of moving away from rote learning and developing a more critical and creative cognitive approach to teaching. However, the Report does not clarify what this approach entails: it is not self-evident from the rhetoric of policy documents what is meant by 'critical' and 'creative'. Nor does the Report offer suggestions for how to go about developing this approach, except to note that a large proportion of schools does not give students enough practice in reading and writing, which it is felt are important to develop critical, selective, analytical and interpretative reading skills and critical, creative, interpretive, reflective, analytical and transactional writing skills. However, Bruner *et al.*'s (1966 cited in Kolb 1984) findings refute the notion that reading and writing can teach these skills. In addition, Scribner and Cole's (1981) research shows that although becoming literate in the specific context of Western schools was highly correlated with higher order skills of the type cited above, it was not reading and writing *per se* that taught these skills. Penrose's research (1992 cited in Geisler 1994) reveals that students can engage in writing without much thought; without the active involvement or critical reflection associated with generating knowledge in a discipline. Very interesting is the use of the word 'generating', implying that what can be known in a discipline is not a body of knowledge that exists and that must be learned, but rather that the knowledge is 'constructed' (generated) by the participants (cf. chap 2: 2.2.3). Another assumption is that those learners who have language proficiency at a conversational level will learn decoding and decontextualized interpretation skills through learning to read (Geisler 1994). It thus appears that there is confusion in the education system about how learning occurs and therefore, about what should be taught to effect learning. This confusion is reflected in the White Paper's (DoE 1998) perception that reading and writing teach critical thinking, or "bring about intellectual changes" (Geisler 1994) and stems from linking reading and writing (literacy) to higher order skills (cf. chap 2: 2.2.2).

Students need particular levels of knowledge and mastery of academic practices to gain epistemological access (Morrow 1994) to the disciplines they will study at

tertiary level. Some universities believe that it is not realistic to expect learners to come already prepared with the knowledge, practices and competencies to succeed at university, and that it is the task of universities to build these academic competencies where necessary and to assist learners through access courses, supplementary programmes and learner support rather than to exclude them. Other universities expect selection procedures to act as filters so that the majority of learners who are admitted are able to succeed without supplementary assistance. As mentioned above, a number of universities stipulate competence in the language of instruction as an important predictor of success (SAUVCA 1999). Bock (1988) argues that academic literacy should be the end point of a degree course and not the starting point. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) see the acquisition of academic literacy as a process of acculturation in which students acquire knowledge of the rules and conventions of the academy. Geisler (1994) argues that students need support to move from being academic novices to becoming academic professionals. Students need to become familiar with academic discourse; they need to become academically literate and academic literacy only comes about through a period of apprenticeship (Boughey 1997).

Education discourses (like those mentioned in the foregoing discussion) about what it entails to access higher education and to succeed in the world outside formal education are influenced by wider social and economic discourses. Since language is arguably at the heart of discourses on access and success and since the SC examination has a crucial role to play both in providing access to HE and in indicating actual or potential success in other spheres, the research described in this thesis focuses on the examination and, more particularly, the second language papers of the examination.

1.3 Research Problem

From the preceding discussion, it appears that the legitimacy of the South African school-leaving qualification – the SC of the present and the NSC of the future – is intricately related to perceptions about the needs of learners. Since the majority of learners will write the examination using a language which is not their mother tongue and since the language and literacy issues described in section 1.2.2. above confound and compound the debates about what should be tested, what should be taught and, therefore, what should be learned, the research described in the thesis attempted to identify the way in which the English second language SC examination

papers construct learners' needs. In order to do this, it identifies the construction of learners' needs as discourse-related.

More specifically, the question which the research seeks to answer is:

How does the Senior Certificate examination construct English Second Language learners' needs?

In the context of the research described in this thesis, discourses are understood as sets of ideas which are shared by communities of people and which give rise to practices which then define and sustain those communities and, thus, the discourses themselves. Discourses are kept in place at all levels of society through systems and structures such as institutions and official "agents" such as family and professions – all of whom use discourses more or less consciously as a manifestation of power (Foucault 1980). Foucault characterizes discourses as "weapons of attack and defense in the relations of power" (Foucault 1982: xi) and Chourliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 63) describe discourse as "the sort of language used to construct some aspect of reality from a particular perspective". A discourse, therefore, is not simply language in an innocuous sense: it is language insofar as it converges with power and knowledge (Olivier 2003). Discourses are thus ideological in intent and promote different interests at the cost of others.

Examination papers represent a particular domain of social practice and are thus constructed through discourse. The ideological nature of discourse necessitates a critical orientation to research which interrogates, challenges and critiques the status quo, including past theories of societies, or traditional theories. Within a critical orientation, critical discourse analysis (CDA), a method of deconstruction, is used to analyse how discourse affects social structure and vice versa, and how it positions people in the interests of power (Janks 2001).

CDA has been criticized for being neither sufficiently theoretical nor rigorous (Widdowson 1998). To combat this criticism, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) charted a method to follow when doing CDA and the researcher attempted to follow this method.

Although curriculum statements for the new NSC examination have been developed, it is envisaged that the identification and critique of discourses constructing the needs of English second language learners in the SC examination will have the potential to inform the debate about what should be tested (and therefore what should be taught

and learned) in the new examination because of the stability of dominant discourses and the practices they give rise to. Regardless of the new curriculum statements, the NSC will still be 'the child' of the SC since many of the elements which sustain the older examination will still be in place. The research described in this thesis therefore comes at a significant time in the history of South African education.

1.4 Organization of Thesis Chapters

The thesis follows the following structure:

Chapter two explores what it means 'to know' – to have knowledge – and what the implications are for assessment of the way in which knowledge – and having knowledge - is understood. Habermas's (1972) theory of cognitive interests informs the perspective on knowledge.

Chapter three provides a brief history of the rise of critical theory, explores various claims to knowledge, discusses the chosen methods of analysis – critical discourse analysis – and evaluates critical theory as a perspective informing research design.

Chapter four describes the critical discourse analysis undertaken in this study and identifies the sets of ideas (discourses) that are constructing ESL learners' language needs in both the language and comprehension and literature SC examination papers.

Chapter five presents the conclusions and recommendations of the research study.

Chapter 2 Knowledge and Assessment

2.1 Introduction

In the context of the research which shows that fewer than twenty per cent of the more than half a million learners who annually enroll to write the SC examination achieve endorsement (SAUVCA 1999) and that many of those who achieve an endorsement are still underprepared for HE (Yeld 2003), any attempt to understand the way the SC examination constructs English Second Language learners' needs has to begin with an exploration of what it means 'to know' – to have knowledge – and what the implications are for assessment of the way in which knowledge – and having knowledge - is understood. Habermas's theory of cognitive interests is pertinent to this exploration. Simultaneously, Fink's (1995) understanding of Lacan's "four discourses" will be used by way of comparison. Although Lacan's "four discourses" seek to account for the structural differences among discourses, they are shown to complement Habermas's theory of cognitive interests as well as to elucidate the way in which discourses function.

2.2 Habermas's Theory of Cognitive Interests and Knowledge

Habermas's theory of cognitive interests is an attempt to find the roots of the theory of epistemology (McCarthy 1984). Habermas (1972) identifies three cognitive interests: technical, practical and emancipatory. By 'interests' Habermas means the "fundamental orientations of the human species" (Grundy 1987: 9). There is a close tie between knowledge and interest, as interest is understood as a standpoint from which to grasp reality (Aronowitz 1987/88 cited in Ellsworth 1989). Habermas (1972) proceeds from the premise that the human species is basically orientated towards pleasure. For Habermas, the concept of pleasure involves creating the conditions for survival. The highest form of this pleasure is then experienced as rationality. Grundy (1987: 9) clarifies that survival does not depend on instinct and random behaviour, but on knowledge and human action.

The tendency of the Enlightenment was not to accept any authority – since authority is a source of prejudice as it wishes to dominate – but to decide everything before the "judgement seat of reason" (Gadamer 1982: 241). However Gadamer (1982: 246) posits that reason "constitutes the ultimate source of all authority". Lacan (1966 cited in Fink 1995) maintains that as long as an argument takes on the *guise* of rationality and reason it will suffice. In other words, appealing to reason ratifies the voice of authority and in this sense "Authority... is responsible for one's not using one's own

reason at all” (Gadamer 1982: 246). A pertinent example of the completely opposing outcomes of using reason is the judgement passed down in the case of Pierre Reviere (Foucault 1982; cf. chap 3: 3.6).

A more liberal approach to reason is put forward by Caputo (1998) who advocates “deconstructing” reason to redefine and redescribe it, not jettisoning it.

Habermas (1972) believed that mankind is capable of a fundamental, “pure” interest stimulated by reason. For Habermas (1972 cited in McCarthy 1984) reason encompasses the “will to achieve autonomy, and responsibility in the conduct of life”. Responsibility is the “first word” in deconstruction, according to Caputo (1998: 50): responsibility of the kind linked with Aristotle’s (cited in Gadamer 1982) concern with correctly estimating the role reason plays in moral action, since for action to be moral there must be responsibility (cf. 2.2.4 where Aristotle’s perspective is related to the practical interest). Responsibility is a tenet of the emancipatory interest (cf. 2.2.5) and not of the technical interest, as discussed below.

2.2.1 The technical interest

The technical interest, or “technical rationality” as Gibson (1986) terms it, is the basic instinct people have to manage the environment, which includes other people.

Technical *rationality* [my emphasis] appears to be a contradiction in terms if others are included, since according to Gibson (1986: 7), the desire to dominate and exercise power over others “results in the decline of reason” since individual and social growth is “stultified and distorted”. Ellsworth (1989) points out the extent to which the myth of the ideal rational person and the universality of propositions have been oppressive to those who are other. Post-structuralist thought – which is bound to discourse and not to reason (Ellsworth 1989) – has demonstrated that the discourse of rationalism upholds “rational competence as a series of exclusions – of women, people of color, of nature as historical agent ... and of aesthetics” (Aronowitz 1987/88 cited in Ellsworth 1989). In other words, the logics of rationalism and “scientism” (Habermas 1972) have been predicated on (given as a reason for) and made possible through the exclusion of socially constructed, ‘irrational’ Others. For example, Said (1978 cited in Seidman 1998: 331-32) makes the point that before there could be European colonization, there had to be an idea of Europe and the west, as opposed to the east and an assumption that the west was superior while the east was inferior and in need of social progress. This type of imperialist discourse depicts conditions of empire as being beneficial to colonized people (Olivier 2003,

Pennycook 2003), thus promoting the interests of empire at the cost of the interests of the colonized. Identifying and questioning assumptions of the kind cited above, is indicative of the capacity to think critically (a tenet of post-structuralism).

The technical interest is linked to the empirical-analytical sciences and gave rise to a form of knowledge known as positivism. Knowledge became identified with science, whereas in Kant's critical philosophy, science was comprehended as only one category of possible knowledge (McCarthy 1984). The traditional (positivist / scientific) paradigm sees knowledge as grounded in positive observation and experience. However, the concept of experience is obscure (Gadamer 1982: 310). It is the aim of science to objectify experience; to hold that experience is universal and can be repeated by anyone (Gadamer 1982: 314). It is argued that since individual observations confirm the same regular patterns to experience, one can enquire into the reasons for these patterns and hence move forward into science. Experience becomes valid "only if it confirmed", "not contradicted" (Gadamer 1982: 311, 314). However, experience is not negated if not confirmed: experience is full of contradictions. It is also a process: false generalizations are continually refuted by experience (Gadamer 1982: 316) and we gain better knowledge of what we thought we knew, that is, of a universal (Gadamer 1982: 317), which is why Gadamer states that experience is dialectical. Experience changes individual knowledge because the "experiencer" is aware of his/her experience (Gadamer 1982: 317). In Lacan's "discourse of the analyst" (Fink 1995: 136) knowledge is unconscious. Through analysis the knowledge "caught up in the signifying chain" becomes subjectified. The task of analysis is to bring master signifiers into relation with other signifiers, that is, to dialectize the master signifiers produced through the analysis. With regard to experience, Gadamer (1982) maintains that its dialectic is found in being open to experience, not in definitive knowledge. Moreover, knowledge essentially cannot be defined as it is constituted, and dominant social groups have their own ideas of what counts as knowledge.

A positivist approach uses observation and experimentation to discover certain laws that can be verified and then studied scientifically (Romm & Sarakinsky 1994). From a positivist perspective knowledge is structured according to a series of hypotheses based on the meaning made from observation. These hypotheses are viewed as having predictive powers, allowing mankind to predict what the environment will be like 'tomorrow' and potentially control the environment based on that 'knowledge'. Science is said to represent an objective and universal standpoint, scientific

knowledge mirroring the external world (Seidman 1998: 292). But what happens with control of the environment is that the natural world is subjected to an assault and becomes no more than a “standing reserve” (Heidegger 1977 cited in Olivier 2005); a collection of resources for human use and consumption (Olivier 2005). Even individuals are viewed in this way – implied by the term ‘human resources’. According to Braverman (1974: 165-66, 198), “Human activity is commodified” and “becomes abstract social labour for sale on the market”. This is an important point, because education in SA is focused on this perspective (cf. for example, Prinsloo 2000; Griesel & Pokpas 2003), which has implications for conceptions of literacy and assessment.

According to Habermas (1972), the meaning of viewing knowledge from a positivist perspective is its “technical exploitability”. Instead of acknowledging that all ‘facts’ are socially constructed, humanly determined and interpreted and hence subject to change through human means, technical rationality separates facts from values (e.g. assessment is seen as value-free), means from ends (knowledge is regarded as a means to an end, which disregards its moral nature) and theory from practice (Gibson 1986). Knowledge is viewed as objective and ‘out there’: it appears to have been produced independently of human beings. Theory is valued to the extent that is practical without the necessity of interpretation: it is used to determine and legitimate practice; to confirm already existing knowledge regarding practice; and is therefore prescriptive not propositional (Grundy 1987: 57).

On the other hand, an interest that acknowledges that all knowledge is humanly produced recognizes that psychologists and psychiatrists, criminal justice professionals and spiritual directors all produce the knowledge they apply (Caputo & Yount 1993). The same is true of the knowledge produced by technology; for example, once the principle of the condenser in steam technology had been established a whole branch of physics and thermodynamics developed (Landes 1969 cited in Braverman 1974).

From a positivist perspective, knowledge is universalized and a-historical (Giroux 1981) and independent of time and place. The educator’s role is to transmit this knowledge to learners who are seen as passive recipients of knowledge; as “containers” (Freire 1972b cited in Grundy 1987) to be filled with knowledge.

The technical interest has led to a consumer view of knowledge: knowledge is a consumable that is dispatched with the same efficiency as any other product. This

links to Lacan's (cited in Fink 1995) "discourse of the master" in which the master dominates. This 'master' is the arbitrary, alienating master signifier to which we are all ontogenetically subject. (Ontology is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of being; ontogenetics refers to the development of the individual.) As part of their development individuals are subject to discourses of power, for example, the discourses of religion, government, politics. In Lacan's thesis the "master's discourse" is representative of these discourses of power. No justification is given for the power of the master's discourse, since this power is ideologically constructed and thus legitimated in the same way that what is regarded as knowledge is legitimated (Lyotard 1987: 8). Lacan's "master" is unconcerned with knowledge itself: as long as knowledge can be put to work and the master's power is maintained or grows, all is well. It is interesting to see how the master is hoist on his own petard by the "hysteric's discourse" (cf. 2.2.5). In the master's discourse the "slave" or "other" comes to embody knowledge – knowledge as productive – or as part of economy along with philosophy, science and exchange (Caputo 1998). In a capitalist society the surplus produced by the labour of the other is appropriated by the master. According to Marx (cited in Braverman 1974: 382), surplus labour is a "condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production". In this system a mass of surplus "product" (labour) is transformed into additional means of production. Labour is always "set free" in proportion to increased production because new technologies of production require fewer labourers. Prinsloo (2000: 114) argues that education is implicated, since people have come to be regarded as assets "which can be value-added", and education and training are seen as critical in their skilling.

Positivism relies on the scientific community's attempts to simplify reality to make it fit chosen categories using processes such as operationalism, measurement and laboratory experiment (Harris 2003: 143). The development of a science involves establishing many rules, laws and formulae, which replace the judgement of the individual (Braverman 1974: 114). All subjective elements are thus methodologically excluded from knowledge, including 'I' and 'you'. In this way the capabilities and phenomena disclosed in laboratory manipulations come to count as knowledge of things that circulate in other contexts (Rouse 1993). Gadamer (1982: 322) views this process as "a naïve faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it".

In 'practical' terms, technical knowledge is conceived of as generalizable. It is believed that the rules or principles that can be applied in one situation can be easily

transferred to another (Grundy 1987: 48-49). In contrast, knowledge which is constructed internally is subjective and not generalizable. And, as Grundy (1987: 66) points out, it is not necessary to understand to follow rules.

According to Habermas (1972: 80-83), positivism “demands utility and precision of knowledge”, yet “it is only through metaphysical concepts that positivism can render itself comprehensible”. The objective knowledge produced by empirical-analytic inquiry is not possible without inter-subjective understanding (McCarthy 1984). Habermas (1972) argues that the abstract, general reasoning of the metaphysical is the only reference system available to distinguish between science (“the concept of the immediately given as essential”) and the changeable and accidental. Facts must be interpreted and interpretation is always inferential; inferences are tied to representational signs and therefore knowledge is discursive (Habermas 1972: 97-98). Northedge (2003) concurs, arguing that to be knowledgeable is to be “capable of participating in the specialist discourse of a knowledge community”. Certainly “language is central to the conduct, determination and understanding of all social life” (Gibson 1986), since it shapes our perceptions and experiences of the world (Donald 1991). However, the positivist paradigm objectifies knowledge to the extent that it is separated from language, or else knowledge is expressed in a language which is “basically technical and allegedly value free” (Giroux 1981 cited in Grundy 1987: 34). Christie (1985) identifies this from a linguistic perspective when she makes a distinction between “language as an instrument of communication”, which is used as a vehicle to pass on ideas, thoughts and information to others, and “language as a resource”, predicated on the idea that language is implicated in knowledge construction.

Technical rationality not only objectifies knowledge; it reifies human relations and products. Harris (2003: 136) explains reification as “the tendency for human relations and products to become things, or thing-like” – what Romm and Sarakinsky (1994) term “objectivation”. Cultural phenomena are regarded as being thing-like, that is, real, fixed and natural (and hence unchangeable) and therefore beyond criticism, leaving no alternative, whereas culture is susceptible to change (Grundy 1987). Through ideological oppression, therefore, control over nature is fostered and simultaneously, “control over society is enhanced” (Seidman 1998: 188). Science, social science and philosophy reify the social world, turning experiences into data and letting objects stand for processes, for example, test scores standing for human capabilities or qualities (Harris 2003). This is done to control people directly through

manipulation and indirectly, according to Harris (2003: 137), “through the cultivation of political passivity, a kind of political consumerism, where people lose interest in critical and creative forms of politics”. Brookfield (1997) draws the analogy that the individual feels as powerless to influence the actions of political leaders as s/he does the course of the weather. For an example of this type of passivity ‘in action’, see the conclusions of Willis’s (1977) study, reported in chapter 3, section 3.3.

According to Grundy (1987: 12, 25), “the technical cognitive interest extends into education and informs the objectives model of curriculum design”. Grundy (1987:5) argues that curriculum is a cultural and social construction; a “way of organizing a set of human educational practices”. Curricula are socially constructed and humanly determined and interpreted. A cultural view of curriculum is concerned with the way in which the curriculum affects people while a social view acknowledges social influences upon curriculum design (Grundy 1987). Many discourses influence and sway teaching practices, curriculum design, assessment and language policy. Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) cultural reproduction thesis draws attention to the subtle way in which culture works in schools to reproduce dominant forms of power relationships. In a reproductive view of curriculum, teachers reproduce in the material world the ideas that already exist in the abstract world, or which have been produced elsewhere. These include particular values and beliefs circulating in the discourses of the institution, which reflect the dominant discourses of the society, for example, economic discourses that promote an instrumental perspective on what it means to teach and to learn. This perspective is not questioned. As Schmelzer (1993: 136) observes, subtle power relations constrain serious rethinking of what it means to teach or to learn.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) took this notion of education as reproductive to the extreme, arguing that the function of schools is to reproduce the class divisions of capitalist society. Through its hidden curriculum, schooling produces workers who are “subordinate, docile, punctual and conforming” (Gibson 1986). Although Gibson (1986: 48-9) slates Bowles and Gintis’s ‘correspondence theory’ as being “simple” and “crass” and falling into “the trap of orthodox Marxism” where economic relations determine education, politics and religion, he acknowledges that consistently over time, working-class pupils achieve less well than their middle-class counterparts: “Working-class children are predisposed by their socialization to enter manual occupations” (Gibson 1986: 57). This may be owing to the gate-keeping nature of capitalism that favours the middle classes. However, family influence and culture also

play an important role in the socialization process (Gibson 1986). Street's (1984, 1995) ideological model of literacy (cf. 2.2.2) has opened up a way of exploring the ways in which family influence and culture play an important role in grooming students (or not, as the case may be) for the literacy practices they will encounter in school.

A supporting view is that of Giddens (1979 cited in Romm & Sarakinsky 1994) who argues that the individual has no private, unsocialised, unstructured part, either personal or political; that even dreams are given by society. However, Durkheim (1938 cited in Romm & Sarakinsky 1994) believes – along with Freud – that a certain part of the individual's psyche is beyond and even opposed to society. Romm and Sarakinsky (1994: 219), Fairclough (1985) and other critical theorists view individuals as both producers and products of society: social institutions shape the consciousness and behaviour of people through discourse and, simultaneously, people participate in the construction of social meanings and shape the discourses. Critical theory has therefore moved away from its earlier structural analysis of history (Marxist) to an analysis based on the philosophy of language, which Lynch (2001) maintains, is due to the work of Habermas. From a post-structuralist perspective, therefore, discourse has replaced the old economic base: people subscribe to the dominant discourses (e.g. discourses of class domination, sexism, racism) and so sustain and reconstitute them. Although every society produces its own configuration of social norms – society can never be free of constraint and regulation – post-structuralism suggests a critical perspective towards dominant currents of Western thought / an alternative perspective on contemporary history to liberalism and Marxism (Seidman 1998: 248-249).

Notwithstanding the individual's capacity to resist, predictable order in society is guaranteed because people experience an existential need for security; they do not want to deviate from the established patterns of society that they have internalized, consciously and unconsciously (Romm & Sarakinsky 1994). Simultaneously, they are influenced by powerful others. The dominant classes in society shape and control the beliefs of the subordinate classes to ensure the status quo (Gibson 1986). Their power is integrated in laws, rules, norms and general consensus and thus takes the form of "hegemony" (Gramsci 1971). Through hegemony dominant classes win acceptance for those ideologies that serve their interests. Cultural constructions are represented as natural laws (Grundy 1987) which people live by. Apple (1979 cited in Grundy 1987) describes hegemony as those ideas that "saturate" the consciousness

of a society. These ideas (ideologies) circulate in the dominant discourses and so they come to be seen as “commonsense”; as being society’s collective wish (Gramsci 1971). Clarke (1982: 443) describes commonsense as “an intellectual habit, a comfortable way of perceiving reality which recedes so far from conscious inspection that it becomes irrefutable”. This commonsense view of reality can again be linked to Lacan’s (1966 cited in Fink 1995) “discourse of the master” (discussed above). The power of this discourse lies in the fact that it is ideologically constructed and legitimated. By this same process subordinate classes come to accept their subordinate position as natural. Thus ideology works through hegemony by means of discourse to ensure domination and subordination (cf. chap 3: 3.5.1). Universities have played an ideological role in this process: according to Castells (2001b: 207), they “have always been mechanisms of selection and formation of dominant elites”.

Teaching and learning are affected by what ‘interest’ drives the curriculum. By ‘default’, teaching and learning are driven by the technical interest in SA, although there have been attempts to move it to other positions. Knowledge is viewed as a means to an end, as “a set of rules and procedures or unquestionable ‘truths’” (Grundy 1987: 34). For example, in schools the textbook is the most frequently read text where it is presented as “the authorized version of society’s valid knowledge” (Geisler 1994). This approach separates text from writer thus putting the words or knowledge “above criticism” (Olson 1977). Learners are required to master this knowledge. The ‘correct’ answers are in the textbook and all too often plausible answers that the text does not contain or contradict are rejected. Using other knowledge and other texts to challenge meanings in one text and arrive at understandings is not common practice at school, although it is characteristic of academic literacy (Geisler 1994). By using this narrow approach to knowledge and learning, school teachers reinforce their own authority and the autonomy of the text (Geisler 1994) to the detriment of learners. Curriculum, too, is viewed as “fact” (Greene 1971 cited in Auerbach 1986): “a structure of socially prescribed knowledge to be mastered by learners”. Compounding the problem, as Olson and Astington (1993) point out, is the fact that learners respect the ‘official view’ and have a lack of respect for their own beliefs: they therefore fail to analyse “objective knowledge” (Popper 1972 cited in Olson 1996); that is, they fail to criticize the theories, models and other artifacts that establish the norms of society.

Craig (1991) offers an interesting perspective on this situation. Craig proposes that students have a commonsense epistemology which demands that the ‘truth’ be found

in some authority. This 'authority' is elucidated by referring to Lacan's (1966) "discourse of the master" (discussed above). Since students cannot make their own epistemological assumptions explicit, and since they have no assumptions with which to replace these, they 'parrot' what is given as critical thought. Craig calls this a "closed circle of knowledge", offering the explanation that it results from learners' unfamiliarity with constructing meaning from texts. In order for texts to be meaningful to students, they have to make their own meaning. An exploration of how knowledge is constructed is conducted below (cf. 2.2.3).

From the perspective of the technical interest learning, too, is a product that can be evaluated against pre-determined criteria (criterion-referenced assessment), or against other 'products' (human or inanimate), which have been produced under different circumstances (norm-referenced assessment) (Grundy 1987). As Grundy (1987) observes, students are often referred to as the "products of the education system". Judgements made about the individual are normative and relational and inside expectations. The more specific the objectives the greater the chance that the "product" will resemble what was envisaged in the statement of the objectives (Schmelzer 1993). To produce a "product" who conforms with the image of a person who has learned what the educator has set out to teach, both the learning environment and the learner must be controlled / manipulated, although the interest in control is disguised (Grundy 1987: 36). It remains to be seen whether the principles and policies of outcomes based education (OBE) – recently introduced into all levels of the South African education system – have diverged from this perspective on teaching, learning and assessment.

Gramsci (1971) and more recent critical theorists argue that the State exercises hegemony through schooling. Foucault (1972) believes that the disciplinary-based production of social order in schools, prisons, hospitals, factories and the military is central to contemporary Western societies. Order is maintained through technologies of control, such as spatial separation, time management, confinement, surveillance and a system of examinations that classify and rank individuals for the purpose of normalizing social behaviour (Seidman 1998: 245). Gramsci (1971) emphasized that power works through institutions: "Institutions are the means that power uses and not the other way round". Caputo and Yount (1993: 6) contend that institutions – whether school, the military, or prison – will form and / or "well-adjust" the young (and others) into "happy subjects of normalization". Caputo and Yount (1993: 7) maintain that the powerful have produced the science of subjectivity to produce subjects.

Foucault's idea of the panopticon in relation to prisons gave rise to the concept of the internally disciplined subject who is aware that s/he might be 'seen' at any time and who always acts accordingly (Harris 2003: 182). Discipline thus has the effect of normalizing modern life (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). "Every I in the system becomes an eye that sees what the institution asks it to see" (Schmelzer 1993: 128). This subject does not have to rely on someone else telling him/her what to do, but anticipates what the "invisible observer" might make of his/her behaviour. In this way norms ensure that order is maintained to the point where the individual becomes self-regulating. From the point of view of the institution, this form of human subject makes the ideal soldier, worker, student and teacher (Schmelzer 1993). Mezirow (1985a, cited in Brookfield 1997) distinguishes two kinds of assumptions (psychological and cultural) that comprise the framework of understanding about the organization of social life and human behaviour. Psychological assumptions are "inhibitory rules that are unconscious, but that cause anxiety and guilt" when violated (Mezirow 1985a, cited in Brookfield 1997). Cultural assumptions are embedded in the dominant cultural values of a society and transmitted by social institutions, for example, the school.

Caputo and Yount (1993) explain that it is necessary for people to conform to the disciplines of the institution in order for the knowledge (the particular form of knowledge of each discipline, which is contained in the discourse of the discipline) and capabilities developed there to be sustained and extended.

Schmelzer (1993: 131) sees this as one role of the educational institution: preserving the embedded knowledge system. This system is sustained through theory, which directs, confirms and legitimizes practice since it is prescriptive (Grundy 1987: 51) and through the curriculum. Lacan's "discourse of the university" (Fink 1995) is pertinent. Lacan (1966) states: "For centuries, knowledge has been pursued as a defense against truth". This is because Lacan sees the role of the university as legitimizing or rationalizing the "master's" will, since in the university systematic knowledge becomes the ultimate authority.

The particular perspective on knowledge elaborated on above – learning and assessment predicated on the technical interest – is a powerful tool in maintaining the status quo in society. Notwithstanding the fact that tests are instruments of this power, there is wide public acceptance of and trust in tests (Shohamy 2001). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) see this as the result of an 'unwritten contract' between those in power and those who are subject to tests and want to be dominated to maintain their

place and status in society. Assessment is a discourse of power, since success at school ensures access to other societal domains. Tests are often introduced by those in authority to manipulate educational systems and to impose the agendas of those in authority (Shohamy 2001). Because of the social and socially constructed nature of assessment and the socially orientated conceptions of language use, language testing is arguably the most directly involved in issues of power and control (McNamara 2001).

At this point it is necessary to explore concepts of literacy and how these influence language use.

2.2.2 Multiple literacies and language use

Literacy is often seen as a mono-lingual, core basic skill which is easily transmitted (e.g. through schooling) and inherently powerful (Prinsloo 2000). The assumption is that as people acquire this literacy, so their cognitive functioning will be enhanced and they will have greater facility in meta-linguistic awareness (Prinsloo & Breier 1996). A related assumption is that 'having' this literacy improves the individual's chances of acquiring skilled work and becoming socially upwardly mobile. However, Gee (1996) cites Graff (1979) whose research showed that literacy was not advantageous to deprived classes and ethnic groups in relation to income or power: paradoxically, literacy served as a technology for the continued selection of members of one class for the best positions in society. Green (1993: 215) emphasizes that school literacy (which has been identified with the "essayist tradition") involves a "radical exclusion" which is specific to the interests of certain social groups rather than others and to the expression of certain world views rather than others.

The tendency to view literacy as a standard form fails to recognize that the term 'literacy' encompasses a variety of social practices. Furthermore, the rich and varied meaning and uses of literacy are marginalized and treated as failed attempts to access the dominant, standard form of literacy represented by Western-type schooling (Prinsloo & Breier 1996). Prinsloo and Breier point out that the standard form of literacy is, in fact, a cultural artifact. Failure to view literacy as a contextualized social practice is based on an autonomous model of literacy (Street 1984, 1995) and according to Prinsloo (2000), is still a prevalent tendency in education today.

The roots of the autonomous model of literacy can be traced to the development of writing systems. Once language came to be written down, its functions were

significantly affected and social explanations for this change in conventions were sought. Thus arose a belief in the superiority of “essay-text” literacy (Scollon & Scollon 1981) and subsequently, schooled literacy, which has come to be the defining type (Boughey 1998). In other words, verbal-linguistic modes of learning are privileged above other modes because of their association with formal schooling (McNamara 2001). Language came to be seen as autonomous: it was believed that the words on the page make the text’s meaning explicit and give the reader access to its meaning and that a text can be independent of its context of production or interpretation (Geisler 1994). Claims for essay-text literacy are ideological as they derive from a particular belief system and serve to reinforce it in relation to other groups and cultures. For example, Western mainstream forms of literacy are endorsed as international norms (Castells 2001a.) and the discourses of the academy serve this economic interest.

Street’s (1984) ideological model of literacy is termed ideological because it draws attention to the unequal and hierarchical nature of literacy in practice. The ideological model recognizes that any version of literacy practice has been constructed out of specific social conditions and in relation to specific social and economic structures. Social, historical, political, scientific, economic and educational factors play a role in defining literacy. The ideological model views literacy as the ability to play various roles in various fields of participation, which happens in and through language. Literacy is thus multi-dimensional: the individual has multiple literacies at his/her disposal. How an individual acquires multiple literacies links to a discursive perspective on language. According to Gee (1990), ‘literacy’ and ‘illiteracy’ are constituted through discourse. How an individual uses language will depend on the context / setting in which s/he learned the language and how effective an individual is in a particular setting will depend on whether s/he has assimilated the discourse for that particular setting.

At the FET/HE interface some learners have access to the particular type of literacy valued by the academy, while many experience problems since access is dependent on developing particular practices based on values and attitudes (McNamara 2001). As Gee (1996: 59) observes, acquiring essay-text literacy “involves complicity with values, social practices and ways of knowing”. Since the university is a socially constructed community of practice, learners have to find a way of functioning within various discourses that have already been configured (Winberg 1995). The research

described in this thesis identifies the discourses that are constructing learners' needs and thus explicates the literacy that is required by the SC examination.

One of the claims frequently made for literacy is that it enhances cognitive functioning (Ong 1982). However, it is noteworthy that Bruner *et al.* (cited in Kolb 1984) showed that the child's cognitive development at a given age is strongly influenced by access to Western type schooling. And Scribner and Cole's (1981) research showed that becoming literate in the specific context of Western schools was highly correlated with higher order skills such as logic, abstract reasoning, categorization, memorization and language objectivity. Scribner and Cole's research thus showed that there was a shared cause and effect relationship between becoming literate in the context of the Western schooling system and higher order skills. Or in other words, cognitive attributes were the outcome of particular social practices, such as schooling, and not direct results of the acquisition of literacy.

In South Africa there are many disparities in schooling provision within the education system (Israel 2000; Prinsloo 2000 and cf. chap 1: 1.1). In addition, the lived experience of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds is vastly different. Therefore, the "primary discourse" (Gee 1990) (cf. chap 1: 1.3) – that which forms the foundation for discourses acquired in later life – of different groups is not the same. Certain primary discourses are closer to the educational ideal than others. Gee (2003: 33, 35) argues that students have not had equal opportunities to learn unless they have had "equivalent experiences within the relevant semiotic domain in terms of active and critical learning", or "with the relevant specific social languages". Against these criteria, the vast majority of learners in South Africa, therefore, have neither had equivalent opportunities to learn, nor access to the dominant discourses of Western type schooling of which assessment is one. An example of the invidious nature of exclusion of this kind is illustrated by Winberg's (1995) research which revealed that markers allocated higher marks to first language (L1) learners because they had used a discourse of literary criticism, thereby identifying themselves as members of the discourse, although L2 learners had given the same answers but without using the discourse. Gee's (1989a cited in Williams 2005) explanation that students "fall back" on commonsense understandings from their primary discourses and make them "fit" when they have not mastered a "secondary discourse" sheds light on how the L2 learners cited in the example above might have arrived at their answers.

Problems like those cited above that L2 learners face at the FET / HE interface are being erroneously termed “language problems” (Boughey 1998) when it is obvious that there are a host of factors responsible for lack of performance throughout the education system. English skills alone cannot explain the poor academic achievement of learners from diverse backgrounds (Goduka 1998: 37). Braverman (1974) argues that in the institutional setting the child and adolescent practise what they will later be called on to do as adults. The child must adapt to a “speedy and intricate social machinery that dictates the rounds of production, consumption, survival and amusement” (Braverman 1974: 287). This is one way of viewing “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). It can also be seen as including an ability to control the discourse (Angelil-Carter *et.al.* 1994). Those who have been excluded from, or marginalized within the dominant societal discourses, are disempowered.

At this point it is pertinent to explore how it is conceived that learning occurs in Western society.

2.2.3 Knowledge construction

Constructivist epistemology views knowledge as constructed in the minds of learners through social setting (of which the school is one) and lived experience. Piaget’s observation of the way in which his own children learned led him to claim that cognitive development depends on two factors: internal maturation of the child and external stimulation by the environment (Sutherland 1992). Central to this view is the inference that conceptual understanding is dependent on the ability to make links between and within existing frames of reference. Kolb (1984) sees knowledge as derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner. Knowledge is seen as a series of hypotheses that have to be tested in every experience. If knowledge is conceived of as acquiring facts – as it is from the perspective of the technical interest – then this ‘testing out’ is not always possible since facts are often abstract. Furthermore, as noted above, the technical interest seeks to produce the learning outcomes and is focused on product. An interest in product “excludes understanding and meaning-making” (Grundy 1987: 100) in the sense that experience is intrinsically meaningful, since the action is upon subjects; implementing a method to reach an objective. Then can learning from Kolb’s perspective – which involves applying knowledge to the experience of the learner – be said to have taken place?

Pierce (1931 cited in Habermas 1972) concludes that there can be no knowledge that is not mediated by prior knowledge. Furthermore, language is seen as the

enabling mechanism through which understanding of the world is negotiated and re-negotiated; what Northedge (2003: 19) describes as an “enabling participation in knowing”. Wilmot (2003) sums up by stating that learners need to be given the opportunity to access and *articulate* [my emphasis] their prior knowledge of any given topic in order to construct further understanding.

The autonomous model of literacy (Street 1984) contradicts the discursive nature of learning (cf. section 2.2.2 for a discussion of this model). From the perspective of the autonomous model, meaning is intrinsic to language which is thought to function as an instrument of communication (Christie 1989). However, Olson (1977) distinguishes between utterance – where meaning is viewed as extrinsic to language, and text – where meaning is intrinsic. Olson (1977) cites a number of researchers who have demonstrated that sentence comprehension depends to a large extent on the context and the prior knowledge of the listener / reader, which suggests that meaning is extrinsic to language. New concepts and ideas can have meaning only when they can be related to something the individual already knows (Carrell & Eisterhold 1989). Moreover, not only is there implicit cultural knowledge presupposed in a text, but background knowledge (BGK) is culturally bound and biased (*ibid.*). In the case of L2 learners then, the learner must possess and activate the appropriate culture-specific schemata to make sense of culture-specific texts.

Olson points out that development of the alphabet ‘put the meaning into the text’ and altered mankind’s conception of language and of rational man. Statements became dependent upon an explicit writing system and an explicit form of argument, the essay. Scollon and Scollon (1981) call this defining type of literacy “essay text literacy”. It became the writer’s task to create autonomous text – to write in such a way that the sentence explicitly represented the meaning through logically connected prose. An intellectual bias thus originated, that Olson (1977) believes characterizes our present use and assessment of language. The assumption is that if learners know the surface rules of language and can apply them then their writing ‘problem’ would be remedied. It is also assumed that learning to read teaches decoding and decontextualized interpretation skills (Geisler 1994). However, Lipson’s (1982) and Alvermann, Smith and Readence’s (1985) research (cited in Geisler 1994) shows the limited impact of reading textbook material on learning because students learn the information only when it is compatible with their prior knowledge. Their research thus supports Kolb (1984) who claims that resistance to new ideas stems from their conflict with old beliefs that are inconsistent with them. This seems to corroborate

Dewey (1934 cited in Kolb 1984) that learning is exponential: new learning is added to prior learning – learning that has already taken place. However, learning is not predictable. Simply because a learner has been present in a learning situation, does not mean learning has taken place because of the other unquantifiable factors that influence learning. Grayson (1996) notes that sometimes old learning has to be restructured to accommodate new learning. Dewey (1934 cited in Kolb 1984) emphasizes the element of time in learning, observing that what is learned needs time to be consolidated. If learning occurs too quickly, it is thin and confused; if too long a period elapses, new learning is lost through what Dewey (*ibid.*) calls “inanitia”: “emptiness, esp. exhaustion from lack of nourishment” (*The Reader’s Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder* 1993). Griesel and Pokpas (2003) suggest that since learners are not static, assessment must identify different levels of attainment, particularly in a system where vast disparities occur in provision of learning and learning opportunities.

Schema theory is also applied to texts. According to van Dijk and Kintsch (1978, 1983 cited in Wood 2003: 62-63), when a text is processed the learner uses two main sorts of structures: an already-existing genre schema (or superstructure) that recognizes the typical functions of the new text; and a situation model. To construct this model in episodic memory, the learner must activate the frames and scripts, which have been formed through having processed discourse in his semantic memory, that relate to persons, situations, objects, actions, relations. Fairclough (1992) calls these frames and scripts “texts” and maintains that the individual uses them to make sense of the world. Having activated these frames (texts), the learner can compose a possible world that the text may be referring to. Once this situation model is constructed, parts of it may be stored in semantic memory to be reactivated as a knowledge resource when processing other texts. Lamb’s (2002) understanding is that elements of the text activate meanings in the minds of interpreters and that a text cannot be interpreted except by constructing a “content representation”, which is connected while it is being built, to those parts of the interpreter’s internal information system. Therefore understanding a text consists of relating the results of its decoding to the already present information. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) believe that learners have to be taught to be able to use and select from all the available semiotic resources for representation in order to make meaning, while at the same time combining and recombining these resources to create possibilities for change. No-one is born with schematic structures of memory. They are formed through life’s experiences, one of which is processing text.

According to Gadamer (1982), to understand a text, it is necessary to relate the text to oneself and one's particular hermeneutical situation. However, research (Pearson 1984 cited in Geisler 1994) has shown that teachers do not see the importance of connecting texts with students' personal experiences. Texts are often dealt with as if they are authorless or autonomous (cf. 2.2.2), when in fact part of interpreting texts requires distinguishing what the particular writer (or speaker) is attempting to get a particular audience to believe and what the current reader him/herself actually believes (Olson 1994). Genre theory, derived from systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 2003), which emphasizes the importance of social context, has taken up this point in identifying the purpose of a text.

In HE educators and students organize their lives around the reading and writing of academic texts. It is recognized that knowledge is "...not pinned down on the pages of a book... but arises out of a process of discoursing" (Northedge 2003). Meanings are constructed through interaction with text and the assertions made in text are to be scrutinized and challenged. This implies critical thinking (Brookfield 1997). Northedge (2003) adds that academic discourse is "governed by rules of evidence-based logical analysis and structured debate". However, Brookfield (1997) asserts that critical thinking is more than the skill of logical analysis. Besides questioning assumptions, it involves being willing to think and act differently on the basis of this questioning. It also involves using other texts to challenge meanings in one text and arrive at understandings. Many learners have not acquired this particular type of literacy: their literacy sees texts as being "above criticism" (Olson 1977); as 'truth'. The text is viewed as autonomous and authoritative. Problematically, academic literacy demands that students develop an 'own voice'. According to Grundy (1987: 107), emancipation is the "act of finding one's voice". Simultaneously, there is also an unspoken assumption that students' literacy should mirror the literacy practices of the academic professions (Geisler 1994). Add to this the argument that at school individuality is rewarded only within the limits of the norm (Caputo & Yount 1993; Schmelzer 1993), and it is not difficult to understand why Goduka (1998: 41) sees indigenous learners as "conditioned into a state of dependency on a system they do not understand and are unable to influence because they lack the critical skills to make their needs, interests and concerns heard". Positivist notions of the autonomy of the text and the authority of the teacher result in indigenous learners (and probably other learners as well)

...consistently [being] silenced by educators... [and] often trapped in classrooms with teachers who not only prevent them from finding their voice - the discourses available ... to make themselves understood and listened to, and to define themselves as active participants in the world - but who also thwart their [the indigenous learners'] contextual understandings of how what they are learning in the classroom can be used to transform their lives (Goduka 1998: 41).

However, as noted above (cf. 2.2.1), teachers too are products of a system where technical rationality holds sway. Teachers are constrained by a means-end orientation to knowledge (that is, getting results) which, according to Grundy (1987: 35), “thwarts much of the potential richness in the students’ understandings of the world”, since the methodology underpinning the content is “determined by positivistic requirements about objectivity and outcomes”. McNamara (2001) elaborates the latter point, noting that teachers are burdened by having to generate the assessment data required by policy makers and system managers who demand greater accountability and more accurate reporting. Institutional needs determine both what is assessed and the procedures for assessment. The needs of teachers and learners are not well served by assessment practices of this nature (McNamara 2001). Although the FET curriculum wants to empower learners to “use language as a tool for critical and creative thinking” since it is recognized “that knowledge is socially constructed through language and that language and thought are closely connected” (DoE, 2002a: 51-52), a positivist culture of learning militates against this goal being realized.

Weber was one of the first sociologists to suggest that the study of society cannot be based solely on the positivist methods of the natural sciences (Romm & Sarakinsky 1994). Prior to this the human sciences, for example, sociology and psychology, were marginalized and their status as sciences fiercely contested. Weber argued that since human beings are self-conscious the methods used to study them should be different from those used to study objects that are not self-conscious. The practical interest (Habermas 1972) – noted at the beginning of this chapter – addresses this subjectivity which it recognizes as intrinsic to learning.

2.2.4 The practical interest

In contrast with the technical interest that formulates rules to control the environment, from the perspective of the practical (cognitive) interest (Habermas 1972) humankind

is concerned with understanding the environment in order to interact with it to survive (Grundy 1987) – and understanding always involves interpretation. According to Gadamer (1982: 274), “...understanding is always an interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding”. McCarthy (1984: 56) views the practical interest as facilitating “possibilities of mutual and self-understanding in the conduct of life”.

Producing knowledge through interpretation is associated with the historical-hermeneutic sciences; historical and literary interpretation and the notion of texts (Grundy 1987: 13). Grundy explains that the interpretative sciences record action and reproduce it as text so that it can be interpreted. Application is also an integral part of the hermeneutic situation. Gadamer (1982) argues that understanding always involves the application of what is to be understood to the interpreter’s present situation (cf. 2.2.3 for a discussion on Kolb’s perspective). Viewing knowledge from this perspective recognizes that knowledge is subjectively constructed; that it depends on human agency; and that what is regarded as knowledge varies depending on the perspective of different social groups.

Gadamer (1982: 298) explains application (mentioned above) as “mediating between then and now, between the ‘you’ and the ‘I’”. Individuals understand themselves only in the “sphere of what is common” in which they simultaneously understand the other (Habermas 1972 cited in McCarthy 1984). Their two experiences of life are articulated in the same language, which for them has “inter-subjectively binding validity” (Habermas 1972 cited in McCarthy 1984). Inter-subjectivity and mutual understanding are thus made possible through a common language. The action that is generated as a result of agreement between subjects is the action of one subject acting with another subject and is thus also inter-subjective. However, herein lies the danger of the practical interest: humans have a propensity to be deceived as to the ‘true’ meaning of events. One reason for this is that all interpretative understanding is necessarily bound to preconceptions and prejudgments (McCarthy 1984) and these are not at the interpreter’s free disposal. The interpreter is not able to separate in advance the preconceptions that make understanding possible from the prejudices that hinder understanding (Gadamer 1965 cited in Connerton 1978).

This is because individuals are unaware of the ideological dimensions of the subject positions they occupy (Fairclough 1985: 753). Subjects are also always constrained by discourse. The individual is always operating within a discourse even when talking

about discourse (Fink 1995). In fact, the whole idea of the individual as autonomous subject, according to Fairclough (1985: 754), is an “ideological effect”.

The other reason is “false consciousness”, a Marxist concept. The concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1971) provides insight into the way in which consent for the system is organized (cf. 2.2.1). Through hegemony dominant classes win acceptance for those ideologies that serve their interests and cultural constructions are represented as natural laws (Grundy 1987). Harris (2003) explains that a dynamic process of cultural interpretation works to ensure that emerging concerns and demands are incorporated into an overall view that preserves the system. This results in false consciousness because a separation has occurred between critical consciousness and social reality. A distinction has been drawn between the inner being and the outer world. An objectivist separation has occurred between “individual” and “society” and between “private” and “public”, whereas in reality, this separation does not exist. Christie (1989) observes that by creating this dichotomy it is not to say that the distinctions so created actually exist. However, accepting the distinction as taken-for-granted commonsense (Fairclough 1985), has the effect of leaving social, public reality as an un-analyzed necessity, which explains why Harris (2003: 140-141) contends that individuals can only retreat from or speculate about it without being able to act. The irony is that according to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), a key property of a successful public sphere is one in which citizens (individuals) can address together issues of social and political concern.

More optimistically, Aristotle saw the purpose of knowledge as governing action. The Greek notion of *praxis* (practical action) was that action could be taken on the basis of a thorough understanding of the situation (Grundy 1987: 65). Aristotle (cited in Gadamer 1982: 280) believed that “through education and practice” the individual develops an attitude that he is “constantly concerned to preserve in the situations of his life and to prove... through right behaviour”. From Aristotle’s perspective, therefore, it is through practical (ethical) knowledge that the individual discovers what right action is required in any given situation. This kind of knowledge comes through the realization on the part of an active being that every situation requiring ethical action is singular, rather than establishing theoretically what exists (Gadamer 1982: 280) as occurs when knowledge is predicated on the technical interest (cf. 2.2.1). The practical interest takes up this point, conceding that access to ‘facts’ is by understanding meaning and by taking right (“practical”) action within a particular

environment (Grundy 1987: 13, 60). Grundy views this action as seeking some improvement in a subject or situation (Grundy 1987: 64).

Gadamer contends that human beings (barring children) are all in the position to act and hence must already possess and be able to apply moral knowledge in a particular situation – “seeing what is right within the situation and laying hold of it” (Gadamer 1982: 283). Aristotle also saw knowledge as an essential component of moral being (Gadamer 1982). Moral knowledge has no particular end, whereas “all technical knowledge is particular and serves particular ends” (Gadamer 1982: 286). The conceptual relationship between means and ends thus distinguishes moral from technical knowledge. Moral knowledge embraces means and ends (Gadamer 1982: 287) and hence differs from technical knowledge, which sees the means as the expediency that might serve the attainment of the ends. The means may not be valid, but yet may serve the ends, for example, assessment based on content and knowledge that serves the interests of those in power and excludes unwanted groups.

According to Gadamer, the individual is always involved in a moral and political commitment and acquires his/her construct of a concept from that standpoint. The guiding principles that the individual describes as ‘knowledge’ always have to be made concrete in the situation of the person acting (Gadamer 1982: 286). Knowledge of the particular situation thus completes moral knowledge. The individual learns to see the situation as one of action and hence in the light of what is right (Gadamer 1982: 287). “What is right cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action” (Gadamer 1982: 286). In other words, one will not know what right (moral) action is required without knowledge of the particular situation. McCarthy (1984) sees this action as “a system of interactions mediated by ordinary language” – his definition for communicative action.

Aristotle (cited in Gadamer 1982) talks about “phronesis” (the virtue of thoughtful reflection) in order to be united with others in seeking what is right. Grundy (1987: 61) views the action arising out of phronesis as involving “practical judgement” through reflection: this action is based on knowledge that has been made personal through reflective reasoning and experience. Knowledge can thus be viewed as a series of hypotheses that have to be tested – like experience – in every situation rather than a method that must be implemented to reach an objective.

From the perspective of the practical interest, it is not sufficient that the educator is able to 'understand' the text. Both pupil and teacher must interact to make meaning of the text – and 'text' here can be extended to mean the "knowledge store of the society" (Grundy 1987: 76) – and the world represented by the text. According to Grundy, making meaning of the text is a matter of negotiation between teacher and learner and emerges from systematic reflection. From the perspective of the practical interest the notion of consensus is integral to the interpretation of meaning. Action also presupposes deliberation and negotiation (Grundy 1987: 68). Others must agree that an interpretation is reasonable (Grundy 1987). However, negotiation and consensus depend on the equality and equal rights of the participants. Seidman (1998) emphasizes that rational consensus – consensus shaped by the force of the reasons advanced – is only possible if discourse is open to all individuals who have equal rights. And in the school environment, learners do not have equal rights, but are constrained in contesting validity claims and therefore power hierarchies (Seidman 1998: 190-91). This poses an enormous challenge to education.

Wilmot (2003) understands that the teacher facilitates learning by creating opportunities for learners to access and articulate their prior knowledge of any given topic in order to construct further understanding. Learners are viewed as having internalized this new knowledge if they can demonstrate their ability to apply it by constructing meaning using the facts at hand. However, this is only half the picture. Negotiating meaning through systematic reflection implies that knowledge is not fixed; it is not a product that can be constructed using the facts at hand. It is fluid, liable to change and specific to the context of the individuals involved, that is, to time and place.

The ideological model of literacy (Street 1984) (cf. 2.2.2) stresses the significance of the socialization process in constructing the meaning of literacy for participants, and is therefore concerned with the general, social institutions through which this process takes place, not just the educational ones. In the educational institution literacy is understood in a particular way and does not take into account that knowledge is constructed through socialization practices and that the learner brings this knowledge to the educational institution and uses it to construct additional knowledge (Wilmot 2003). Educators need to try to understand the forms of knowledge production learners undergo in their lives outside the educational institution to understand how schooled literacy could be relevant to them (Prinsloo 2000). This view of knowledge as constructing meaning is supported by Gadamer's (1982) perception that

application is as integral a part of the hermeneutical act as are understanding and interpretation. This realization requires a different approach to teaching (Wilmot 2003) and assessment.

An alternative perspective would be that of emancipatory rationality.

2.2.5 The emancipatory interest

The emancipatory interest, according to Habermas (1972), is the fundamental 'pure' interest stimulated by reason. Reason, for Habermas (1972), is the "will to be rational, the will to achieve autonomy" and is in contrast to "tutelage", which is "man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another". Because of the interactive nature of society individual freedom cannot be separated from the freedom of others. Habermas thus links emancipation with autonomy and responsibility. The technical interest cannot facilitate autonomy and responsibility because it is an interest in control. Only some will gain autonomy and since the interests of the powerful are served, they cannot be relied upon to act responsibly. Although the practical interest regards the environment and individuals subjectively and is concerned with meaning making, it will also not facilitate emancipation because of the "propensity of persons to be deceived" (Grundy 1987: 17), the unreflective operation of hegemony and the notion of false consciousness (cf. 2.2.3). The emancipatory interest, on the other hand, is concerned with freeing people from the coercion of the technical and the possible deception of the practical.

Grundy (1987: 99) sees the emancipatory interest as a development of the practical interest into a "transformation of consciousness" on the part of the practitioner. However, McCarthy (1984) asserts that autonomy / emancipation is attained only through an act of self-reflection in which subjects see themselves as the source of consciousness. There is thus a transformation in the way in which one perceives oneself and acts in the world, which incorporates criticism. Knowing oneself to be a result of the "history of consciousness" on which one reflects, one must direct the critique of ideology at oneself (McCarthy 1984). This includes taking responsibility for one's own implicatedness in the ideologies circulating in the society.

Grundy (1987: 102) sees the substance of the educational experience as a matter of negotiation between teacher and learners. However, from a discursive perspective,

to be able to contribute equally, persons must have equal epistemological⁴ status (Fairclough 1985). This is related to, but not identical with Habermas's (1984) contention that consensus (agreement concerning validity claims) is regulated by the so-called 'ideal' speech situation. To reiterate, this situation does not obtain in the school environment. Learners are constrained in contesting validity claims and therefore power hierarchies since they do not have the same rights as educators (Seidman 1998: 190-91). Therefore, the contention that the substance of the educational experience is a matter of negotiation between teacher and learners (Grundy 1987: 102) is an ideal, requiring a revolutionary new approach to teaching and learning (explored below). Grundy asserts that the negotiation between teacher and learners is neither haphazard nor spontaneous, but emerges from systematic reflection. However, according to Craig (1991), asking learners to reflect does not necessarily lead to critical enquiry. Critical enquiry must allow for the introduction of competing / conflicting values and beliefs so that the learner is required to make a judgement (Craig 1991). As discussed above, McCarthy (1984) asserts that this judgement must be against oneself. Grundy (1987: 103) concedes that common understandings should be subjected to critical scrutiny (Grundy 1987: 109) as active teacher-student engagement is not sufficient evidence of an emancipatory interest.

Emancipation is understood as the overcoming of dogmatism, and with regard to knowledge, particularly, dogmatism in the form of "an objectivist blindness to the subjective conditions of knowledge"(McCarthy 1984). Lacan's "discourse of the hysteric" (Fink 1995) is pertinent here. This discourse is related to Freud's hysteric who continuously proved to Freud the inadequacy of his knowledge. The hysteric "pushes the master... to the point where he or she can find the master's knowledge lacking" (Fink 1995: 134). Since the master "has no interest in knowing" and knowledge itself "remains inaccessible" to him/her, it is the master's reasoning that cannot stand up to the hysteric. Hysterics acknowledge that there are some things that it is impossible for us to know. The "discourse of the hysteric" does not wish to cover over paradoxes and contradictions, but to follow them as far as is possible (Fink 1995: 134-35). The "discourse of the analyst", on the other hand, points out that the analysand is not the master of his or her own discourse for the simple reason that the individual is always operating within a particular discourse, even when talking about discourse in general terms (Fink 1995).

⁴ That which pertains to the discourse of power

Habermas sees the emancipatory interest as being implicit in human nature. It generates critical theories to explain how coercion and distortion operate to inhibit freedom. These critical theories must be authenticated by individuals or groups through processes of self-reflection, which lead to empowerment to engage in action. Empowerment is seen by Grundy (1987: 19) as “the ability of individuals to take control of their own lives in autonomous and responsible ways”. Empowerment flows from the recognition that the cultural world, unlike the natural world, is a human construction and thus capable of being recreated (Grundy 1987). The poststructural vision thus advocates a new moral responsibility to the production of knowledge (Seidman 1998: 250). According to Freire (1972b, cited in Grundy 1987), “The starting point for organizing the programme content of education... must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people”. The supposition is that when learners confront the ‘real’ problems of their existence, they will soon become aware of their oppression. According to Brookfield (1997), this involves more than the skill of logical analysis: it involves questioning the legitimacy of existing policies and political structures. This in turn involves identifying and challenging assumptions and being willing to act. However, Brookfield (1997) warns that giving people the tools to become critically aware of inequities and of their oppressed condition may produce violent results. Ewart (1982 cited in Brookfield 1997) believes that the responsibility to ensure that this does not happen lies with the adult educator – a grave responsibility, indeed, and unrealistic, since it implies that the shortcomings of society in general can be ameliorated by the actions of educators.

To elaborate, Ellsworth (1989) argues that although critical educators may engage with “actual, historically specific struggles” in the classroom – for example, helping students to recognize and name injustices and perhaps subverting repressive school structures from within – the literature and language of critical pedagogy operates at a high level of abstraction. Ellsworth’s (1989) experience was that trying to put discourses of critical pedagogy into practice (by exploring terminology like “social justice”, “empowerment”, “student voice” and “dialogue”) led to relations of domination in the classroom. It is therefore important to provide a clear statement of political agendas: a clear articulation of goals, priorities, risks and potentials when engaging in critical pedagogy.

On the other hand, Brookfield (1997) argues that critical thinking is crucial to creating and maintaining a healthy democracy since it encourages the practice of democratic

principles. It is thus fitting that Shohamy (2001) argues for democratic perspectives on assessment, emphasizing that as instruments of power, tests violate fundamental values and principles of democratic practices. For example, tests are often used as ideologies in the belief that they will upgrade learning. Shohamy argues strongly for the need to protect the rights of test-takers and advocates monitoring the use of assessment as an instrument of power in education and society through critical language testing (CLT). Shohamy challenges the use of 'the test' as the only instrument to assess knowledge and proposes using multiple assessment methods simultaneously. This is because a single test cannot cover all domains of knowledge (Shohamy 2001). Since testers do not own knowledge, collaboration with test-takers is essential to change the balance of power between tester and test-taker. Collaboration includes the need to include the knowledge of diverse groups in multicultural societies. Post-positivist paradigms of assessment recognize this need (for example, the interviewees in the research described in this thesis stressed that content must be accessible to all cultural groups), whereas in the past the dominant majority expected other groups to assimilate and conform to its values and ideologies (Shohamy 2001). An important spin-off from collaboration is that it fosters improvements in programmes (Fetterman *et al.* cited in Shohamy 2001).

2.3 Implications of Habermas's Theory of Cognitive Interests for Assessment

2.3.1 Implications of the technical interest for assessment

As already noted, in the objectives model of curriculum design, scientific processes have been reduced to a set of skills that students need. Curricula are socially constructed (Grundy 1987) and reproduce the dominant culture, which then defines the norm. Learners, too, are objectified and learning is regarded as a product that can be evaluated against other "products" that have been produced under different circumstances (Grundy 1987: 37).

Madaus, Raczek and Clarke (1997) describe assessment as a technology, since it confers power on those who control it. Madaus *et al.* assert that all technology is embedded in a moral context: a test is a sample of performance from a domain of interest (e.g. the technical interest) and testing favours certain values and groups. Shohamy (2001) concurs, demonstrating how groups in authority use tests to manipulate educational systems and to impose the personal agendas of those in authority. Moreover, test results have economic value and can be used by those in power to define knowledge and thus control it.

An objective approach to knowledge does not recognize that knowledge “is mediated through pre-understanding derived from the interpreter’s initial situation” (Habermas 1972). In other words, to fully understand any given situation one must apply it to one’s own situation (Grundy 1987), or experience. Central to this view is the inference that conceptual understanding is dependent on the ability to make links between and within existing frames of reference. Kolb (1984) sees knowledge as derived from and tested out in the experiences of the learner. Knowledge is seen as a series of hypotheses that have to be tested in every experience. Assessment that uses technical reasoning has separated itself from this learning process. Gamaroff (2004) states that the term ‘assessment’ is used to distinguish the measurement of the process from the measurement of the product, arguing that all assessment has to come to terms with the product: the score. Thus, the results of assessment have come to be seen as product and a separation has occurred between teaching and learning, and assessment (Grundy 1987; Wilmot 2003).

From the perspective of the technical interest assessment is norm-referenced; in other words, levels of competency have been standardized. The objective of assessment is measuring and summarizing how much information (knowledge) the individual learner has acquired – and with OBE, what s/he can do; what skills s/he has acquired – and then comparing this score with the ‘norm’ for any given set of learners. According to Grundy (1987: 77) and Heath (1987 cited in Israel 2000), when students are able to demonstrate certain skills, they are deemed to have learned. Whether the student is able to apply the skill to make sense of the world is usually overlooked (Grundy 1987). Although the DoE believes that OBE is a more appropriate response to equity and equality issues in South Africa, assessment continues to be norm-referenced. The DoE’s position is ironic, since to ensure equity and equality the group of learners that is going to be used by way of comparison must reflect the diversity of learners, generally, which means that there can be no ‘norm’ or ‘standard’ group with which learners can be compared, since creating a norm suppresses difference (Lyotard 1987). Currently student populations are increasingly diverse in terms of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and also in terms of their level of preparedness (Boughey 2003). Norm-referenced assessment cannot accommodate this diverse student audience with their varied assumptions and literacies based on their own cognitive and cultural histories.

Gamaroff (2004) maintains that norm-referenced testing is central to the meaning of test scores. Although individual-referenced tests are concerned with how individuals

perform relative to their previous performances, an individual's score is meaningless on its own: it assumes meaning relative to the scores of the other individuals in the group. Gamaroff (2004) points out that the construct validity of a test is dependent on some people doing well and others doing less well, for everyone doing equally well would cause the tester to question what was being tested. This suggests an imperative to find alternative methods of assessment; ones which do not have to rely on a universal subject and universalizing concepts of knowledge.

There is an interesting analogy to be drawn between the preconception of the labour process before it is set in motion (Braverman 1974: 125) and the preconceptions of the outcomes of OBE:

The visualization of each worker's activities before they have actually begun, the definition of each function along with the manner of its performance and the time it will consume, the control and checking of the ongoing process once it is under way, and the assessment of results upon completion of each stage of the process...

Braverman (1974) emphasizes how all these aspects of production have been removed from the shop floor to the management office. Similarly, the education system has control of what should be taught and how it should be assessed.

Assessment is thus not objective. It is also not value-free. Assessment is socially constructed (McNamara 2001), political in nature and seeks to control and thus cannot be value-free. All interpretations of test scores involve questions of value and are not objective. Moreover, there is an unequal relationship between test-takers and test-makers. Test-takers have no say about the content of tests; they do not have the right to understand the inside secrets of tests: they are forced to comply with the test's demands and change their behaviour in order to succeed (Shohamy 2001). They have to do this because the content and knowledge contained in tests represents the interests of those in power, which excludes unwanted groups. Schooled literacy has become the defining type and marginalized other types of literacy (Boughey 1997) (cf. 2.2.2). Moreover, Shohamy (2001) observes that the phenomenon of exclusion of certain groups is "especially relevant in multicultural societies which consist of groups with diverse linguistic, cultural and academic knowledge" – such as in South Africa.

McNamara (2001) argues that since language constructs came to be seen as social constructs, language testing is viewed as most directly involved in issues of power and control (cf. 2.2.3; Shohamy 2001). Language and language use are viewed as objective entities that can be measured (cf. also 2.2.3). Norm-referenced tests are based on a socio-cultural 'norm', which relates to the way in which language is used and literacy practiced. In terms of validity, it is necessary to gather evidence to support assessment constructs. A basic difficulty in proving construct validity – and this is especially relevant in language assessment – is that the construct itself cannot be measured directly since it is a theoretical conceptualization and requires an interpretation or judgement on the part of the assessor (Henning 1987). For example, the interpretation that individuals achieving different scores have different levels of proficiency is a construct (McNamara 2001) needing evidence to support it. Generally speaking this implies that there is a need for empirical evidence of construct validity (Bachman 1990). Ironically, since construct validity involves gathering data and testing hypotheses, when only one method of assessment is used the validity of constructs and therefore of the assessment becomes questionable.

In addition, Messick (1989 cited in McNamara 2001) views test constructs as the embodiment of social values, in that institutional and wider needs determine both what is to be assessed and the procedures for assessment. Furthermore, there are consequences of assessment, what Lynch (2001 citing Messick 1989 & Bachman & Palmer 1989) terms "impact" or "consequential" validity. Consequential validity is also a principal of critical language testing (CLT), where it is viewed as accepting responsibility for the consequences of testing. Although some researchers (for example, Davies 1997 cited in Shohamy 2001) argue that testers cannot be responsible for all the possible consequences of assessment, Hamp-Lyons (1997 cited in Shohamy) argues the opposite.

Although assessment occurs at the micro-level, it has far-reaching effects at the macro-level. Assessment leads to high-stakes decisions about and consequences for individuals and groups (Shohamy 2001). This is especially the case with assessment that occurs on a single occasion (like the SC) and leads to irreversible decisions. Assessment implies judgement and when this judgement is connected to a school leaving certificate such as the SC, the stakes are high. Learners who do not succeed at school are labeled as 'failures' (Wilmot 2003). Tests create "winners and losers... the rejected and the accepted" (Shohamy 2001). As Prinsloo (2002: 43) notes, "Examinations serve as one of the practices of differentiation that result in

stigmatization and normalization". Williams' (2005) recommendation is that assessment must be viewed as a discourse and entry into this discourse must be facilitated.

At the FET/HE interface the problems experienced by learners are designated as "language problems" (Boughey 1998). In an attempt to address the perceived problem, and as already noted, the Report of the Ministerial Investigation into the Senior Certificate (DoE 1998) recommended that assessment of all South African languages be standardized so that all languages at first and second language level are examined "in a comparable way in terms of critical thinking skills and internal language components". Standardization, which is norm-referenced, is part of the traditional or positivist / scientific approach to assessment (Wilmot 2003). The fact that it was assumed that it is possible to examine languages 'in a comparable way' in terms of *critical thinking skills* and *internal language components* [my emphasis] shows an objective stance towards knowledge and a separation of learning from assessment. Learners must be given access to the language of critical thinking. Critical thinking can be seen as a non-overt, social practice; as a socially valued norm, available to those "brought up in a cultural milieu in which it operates" (Atkinson 1997: 89). Atkinson points out that critical thinking skills do not transfer effectively beyond their narrow contexts of instruction, which suggests that learners must be empowered discursively in order to think critically. In evaluating how the SC examination constructs the needs of ESL learners an aim of this research was to determine whether being able to think critically was being approached as a need of learners; whether SC candidates were being examined in such a way as to assess their critical thinking skills, or whether the above objective of the Ministerial Investigation is an example of the way in which "policy as text presents an ideal" (Ball 1994, 1990 cited in Griesel 2000) that "promotes indulgence in rhetoric and idealism" rather than in action (Cele 2004).

2.3.2 Implications of the practical interest for assessment

According to Grundy (1987: 77), the practical interest evaluates whether the learning experience has furthered the "good" of all participants. Grundy recommends that in this regard participants be the judges of their own actions. In other words the *learner* [my emphasis] is required to make a judgement.

This is necessary since only the learners have access to the personal knowledge generated by the learning situation. Moreover, the practical interest views the

practitioner as having an “obligation” to make his/her own meaning of the text (Grundy 1987: 69). But how can this be assessed? In the light of the critical cross-field outcomes of OBE, assessment should mirror the content (the what), the form, approach and skills (the how) of subject knowledge and applied competence, that is, the efficiency with which knowledge and skills can be combined to engage with familiar and unfamiliar problem solving tasks (Griesel & Pokpas 2003). However, the above definition implies that what learners know is an independent, objective entity that can be measured with the proper tools and procedures (Lynch 2001), rather than that those learners be the judges of their own actions.

Wilmot (2003) views assessment as providing information about the progress the learner is making in relation to the curriculum's targets (competences / outcomes), thus serving a formative purpose. Formative assessment is intended to guide students towards meeting the outcomes. It is forward looking, emphasizing the process of learning, not only the product. Continuous assessment (CA) is used to evaluate a learner's progress throughout the year or duration of the course, using a variety of strategies including written examination. CA thus serves both formative and summative assessment purposes (Wilmot 2003). Within a constructivist framework, assessment involves using a variety of methods and a number of tools to gather evidence of the process and the product of learning.

In an attempt to meet current demands (among others, Williams 2005; Lynch 2001; McNamara 2001; Shohamy 2001) for the design and implementation of valid assessment that will empower those being assessed, it is believed that criteria must be transparent. It is perceived that if learners know what is being assessed, what evidence of learning is required and how their work will be marked and graded according to a set of standards, or criteria (Wilmot 2003) then the assessment process is valid.

Although it is believed that using criteria not only enables learners to understand what is being assessed and how it is being assessed, but also enables examiners and teachers to understand what it entails on the part of a learner to comply with the criteria, I argue that criterion-referenced assessment evaluates learning against pre-determined criteria, implying that learning is still being seen as a measurable product, and the results of assessment as quantifiable. For criterion-referenced assessment to be emancipatory, the criteria would have to be negotiated by assessor and candidate. However, negotiation implies speech, which is invested with power. Foucault (1972: 216) asserts that the prohibitions surrounding speech reveal its links

with desire and power. "Rules of exclusion" prohibit certain individuals from speaking of certain concerns and other individuals are privileged, or have exclusive rights to speak of particular subjects. Far from being a transparent and neutral activity, discussion is a privileged arena for discourses to exercise their powers. Assessors have traditionally had exclusive rights to speak of assessment whereas learners / candidates have not.

Because of the invidious nature of powerful discourses and the "propensity of persons to be deceived" (Grundy 1987: 17), there is no guarantee that speaking about (negotiating) the criteria for assessment will result in assessment criteria that do not reflect the interests of power discourses and therefore domains of interest.

Furthermore, the SC examination is not criterion-referenced. It is norm-referenced and therefore cannot accommodate the diversity of candidates whose futures depend on the judgements made about them as a result of their performance in this examination. To reiterate, criterion-referenced assessment evaluates how well a learner knows and understands, or is able to do something. For example, it is believed that if learners can "think critically" and "support the development of knowledge with understanding" they will be able to answer questions that ask "why, reflect, imagine, compare, predict, consider, substantiate, explain, account for, weigh up the evidence" (Wilmot 2003). The above example illustrates the somewhat simplistic understanding, generally, of what it means to 'know' and therefore what constructs can be used to test knowledge, since it does not appear to be taking the socially constructed nature of knowledge into consideration. What does 'comprehension' mean and how can it be assessed? If an examiner asks a test-taker to 'analyse', both examiner and test-taker must have the same understanding of what it means to analyse, and this is of course socially constructed. To illustrate, Williams' (2005) research compared the way in which first year (new to the academic environment) Chemistry students interpreted assessment task verbs of the type cited above, with the way in which their lecturers understood them and discovered that a substantial gap existed between the understandings of the two groups. Students did not understand the instruction component of the assessment tasks in the same way in which the lecturers did. Williams' research emphasizes that unless assessment is seen as a discourse to which learners need access rather than viewing learners as lacking something (vocabulary / grammar / education), examiners may fail to elicit knowledge from learners who in fact possess that knowledge (Logan & Hazel 1999 cited in Williams 2005).

2.3.3 Implications of the emancipatory interest for assessment

According to Lynch (2001: 358), assessment is “the systematic gathering of information for the purposes of making decisions or judgements about individuals”. It is not value-free. Although Williams (2005 citing Gipps 1994, Maclellan 2001 & Shay 2003) notes that HE is “undergoing a ‘paradigm shift’ from assessment as measurement / testing to... assessment as an ‘interpretive process’, Lynch (2001) argues that a critical approach to language assessment is at odds with the dominant educational paradigm. According to Lynch, the current post-positivist research paradigm sees assessment as a “measurement-driven enterprise” (Lynch 2001) where language and language use is viewed as an objective entity that can be measured. Within the school system, teaching for the most part, occurs within a positivist, or at best, an interpretivist / hermeneutic paradigm. Learning is rarely approached using a critical paradigm. As Janks (2001: 243) notes, “There is no understanding that all texts are positioned and work to position their readers and that an awareness of language can help one to understand the constructed and constructive nature of all texts”.

A critical teaching and learning paradigm would be concerned with ‘showing critical awareness of language’. Learners need to be taught to criticize the claims made in the text and the intentions of the author in making these claims. This is not happening: research (for example, Haas & Flower cited in Olson & Astington 1993) has shown that undergraduates are limited in their ability to analyse and criticize texts although they can paraphrase and summarise them. An explanation for this is that the kind of literacy that students have acquired views texts as autonomous and beyond criticism (cf. 2.2.3).

Lynch (2001) and Shohamy (1997 cited in Lynch 2001) argue that alternative assessment can respond better to the implications of a critical perspective on language ability and use than can traditional assessment procedures. This is because language use and ability can best be understood as “realms of social life that do not exist independently of our attempts to know them” (Lynch 2001: 362). This perception equates with Lacan’s analytic discourse (discussed above; cf. 2.2.1), which shows that the individual is not the master of his/her own discourse because s/he is always operating within a particular discourse. Because of the socially constructed nature of language there is no ‘true score’ that can be arrived at with language testing. Therefore, the final mark is an unreliable yardstick on which to measure language performance (Israel 2000). The democratic principles espoused



by Shohamy (2001) (cf. 2.2.5) are thus particularly relevant with regard to language assessment.

Lynch (2001) also emphasizes that there are different validity requirements for different approaches to assessment. Lynch observes that it is the assumptions of the research and practice within which assessment techniques and procedures are embedded that determine their critical potential, not the techniques and procedures in themselves. Within the critical paradigm validity must include ethical considerations and consciously address the power relations at play in the assessment context since assessment and its practices are implicated in social, political and cultural power relations. Critical assessment would need to be self-reflexive: the procedure and the basis for arriving at assessment results would have to be constantly questioned and any move towards a normalized behaviour resisted. Part of reflexivity is “taking in the critical commentary of others on one’s theoretical practice” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 67).

Within the critical paradigm, the portfolio can be used as an alternative assessment instrument since it is ‘non-measurement/non-testing’ in the sense that it is qualitative and has a different basis for determining the validity of decisions and judgements (Lynch 2001). Moreover, it is intended to be self-reflexive, enabling educators and learners to understand the sense learners are making of their progress and achievements over time (Wilmot 2003). Lynch (2001) proposes certain validity criteria (briefly summarized below) for portfolio assessment that would be applicable within the critical paradigm using alternative assessment. Firstly, assessment must be ontologically authentic. In other words, the participants – and this includes all participants and stakeholders – must establish a meaningful identity in the assessment process. Here Lynch draws on Foucault’s (1990) sense of “practices of the self” and the active construction of identity. Secondly, assessment must take all the perspectives of the affected participants into account. By this Lynch – drawing again on Foucault (1982) – means that relations of power must be “mobile”, “reversible” and “reciprocal”. Thirdly, assessment must ensure that the participants gain an improved understanding of the perspectives outside their own group. Fourthly, the assessment process must be examined for its consequences or impact. The outcomes, whether intended or not must be examined for their value, which would entail a negotiated consensus as to whether the outcomes were ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Lastly, Lynch proposes establishing whether power relations have evolved, that

is, whether changes that occur as a result of the assessment process become fixed, or mobile and reversible (which links with the second criterion).

In response to the criticism that in using the above criteria one set of categories for validity has simply been replaced by another, Lynch argues that the above categories are more open to interpretation on a case-by-case basis than are the traditional categories. Ellsworth (1989) makes a case for being wary that the language and literature of critical pedagogy does not perpetuate relations of domination and that to avoid this trap it is essential to clearly articulate the goals, priorities, risks and potentials when engaging in critical pedagogy. How much more so does this not apply to critical assessment.

Although, Lynch acknowledges that using the alternative categories explicated above makes it very difficult to achieve “local consensus to make assessment decisions”, he asserts that without them “assessment cannot meet the critical challenges of alternative paradigm use and self-reflexivity”. Being critical implies judgement and since assessment is a judgement, it can be argued that the only perspective that will adequately suffice when approaching assessment of learning is that of the emancipatory interest.

2.4 Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed Habermas’s (1972) theory of cognitive interests and shown how, from the perspective of each interest, knowledge is constructed. I have also discussed the implications of these constructions of knowledge for assessment. According to Madaus *et al.* (1997), assessment is a technology that confers power on those who control it (cf. 2.3.1). Viewing knowledge from the perspective of the practical interest with its interpretivist orientation does not invalidate Madaus *et al.*’s claim, since it has been emphasized that all interpretations of test scores involve questions of value and are not objective (cf. 2.3.1). With regard to language assessment, particularly, the arbitrary meaning of a test score to reflect a diversity of literacies and therefore, language abilities, invalidates claims of validity and reliability. The portfolio as an alternative assessment instrument has been discussed and defended (cf. 2.3.3). However, to be reliable and valid, its implementation would continuously need to address the power relations at play in the assessment context, necessitating a shift in focus on the part of educators and examiners to the critical paradigm of teaching and assessment.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Any examination of the methodology underpinning a piece of research needs to begin with a discussion of the paradigm or orientation in which the research is located. A paradigm can be defined as “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln 1998:195). Although positivists would say that what can be known is dependent on their empirical observations which are objective, my own position is that a researcher needs to acknowledge that she has a personal belief system, or worldview, which is not objective and which thus cannot be divorced from the research. Or, in different words, the researcher realizes that what can be known is bound up with the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object of research. In this sense “worldview” encompasses the researcher’s assumptions about the nature of the world and the individual’s place in it (ontological assumptions), and about what can be known (epistemological assumptions). Ontological assumptions relate to the nature of the ‘reality’ of what is being researched. Epistemological assumptions relate to the way this reality can be known and inevitably involve the relationship of the researcher to that reality. The researcher must decide how to proceed methodologically on the basis of these assumptions. Methodological assumptions therefore relate to the researcher’s decisions about how to go about discovering what she believes can be known.

For example, if the researcher believes that reality exists outside the human being and that knowledge is objective, generalizable and predictable, then she would seek “verification of the general statements of reality” (Nel 1995:132) by using a positivist orientation. She would use empirical observation, possibly backed up with quantitative statistical methods, and set out to test an hypothesis. An interpretivist orientation, on the other hand, sees knowledge as constructed internally and therefore subjective and not generalizable. Facts cannot be divorced from the material conditions in which they are produced. Their interpretation necessarily involves the worldview, belief system and values of the interpreter and his/her ideological assumptions and findings, therefore, are value-laden (Lather 1986). Thus it is that Habermas (1972) criticizes positivist / empiricist research methods for failing to include the human subject’s role in the production of knowledge (cf. chap 2: 2.2.1).

To understand meaning in a specific context, qualitative research methods are chosen and the research is hypothesis generating.

A critical orientation goes beyond seeking to understand: researchers operating within a critical paradigm challenge and critique the status quo and seek to effect change (Lather 1986; Lincoln & Denzin 1998).

With regard to the above methodological distinctions, Fien and Hillcoat (1996: 26) divide research into that which assists in maintaining the status quo in society or that which “helps to transform the dominant social paradigms”. Critical theory is not only critical of society, it is also critical of past theories of societies, or traditional theories (Nel 1995: 126). On the other hand, Lyotard (1987: 14) criticizes those who partition knowledge into the “positivist kind” and the “critical, reflexive, or hermeneutic kind”. Lyotard believes that the alternative that is needed is “caught within a type of oppositional thinking that is out of step with the most vital modes of postmodern knowledge” (*ibid.*). Certainly the changing foci and strategies of power require different intellectual practices to grasp and explore the processes of exclusion/inclusion in the politics of present day society (Popkewitz 1995).

This chapter presents a brief history of the rise of critical theory, explores various claims to knowledge, and discusses discourse analysis and interviewing as the chosen research methods. Thereafter, it describes the data gathering and data analysis processes used in the study before ending by evaluating critical approaches to research.

3.2 Origins of Critical Theory

Critical theory has its origins in the 1920s with the work of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse which later became known as the “Frankfurt School”. Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse were all members of the Institute for Social Research, a formal department of the University of Frankfurt. The members of the institute had no particular political affiliations and came from a variety of disciplines (for example, music, philosophy, psychology). All saw the need for a complete transformation of society and fostered the development of a critical theory (Nel 1995: 125-26) which would bring about this transformation. The origins of this search for a critical theory can be seen in the fact that Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse were all middle-class, German Jews who had been personally discriminated against by the rise of National Socialism in Germany. Its rise profoundly affected Horkheimer, who had become director of the Frankfurt School in 1931 (Nel 1995: 124), and led him to found a

branch of the Institute in Geneva followed by one in Paris and then another in New York.

Horkheimer and his colleagues were eventually exiled from Germany although their efforts to develop a critical theory were kept alive by the establishment of a journal in 1932. Following the end of World War II and the death of Hitler, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt in 1948 and 1949, respectively, and Adorno succeeded Horkheimer as director of the Institute, which was reconstituted as part of the university.

3.3 Contemporary Critical Theory

Critique can be understood as the essential activities of reason and oppositional thinking. According to Connerton (1978: 37, 38), "...critique [is] reflection on the conditions of knowledge of the social world" and "analysis of constraints imposed by the historically variable structures of the social world". For Fairclough (1985), whose focus is critical discourse analysis (CDA), it is making "visible the interconnectedness of things", which relies on a dialectical theory. The Frankfurt School assimilated and reformed two meanings of critique: critique as reflection on the conditions of possible knowledge; and as reflection on a system of constraints that are humanly produced (Connerton 1978: 18). The first meaning (critique as reflection on the conditions of possible knowledge) originated with Kant, who wished to determine the subjective conditions that make any theory in the natural sciences possible and also place limits on that theory. He reasoned that human perception sees the world as ordered although it is chaotic, and that therefore human perception produces the mode of reality, not reality itself. The second meaning (that human beings produce pressures to which they succumb) is attributable to Freud's insight that his subjects colluded with the constraints they had placed on themselves and internalized. This is an important concept for critical theory. Through collusion (whether in the form of acceptance and / or compliance) dominant groups in society are strengthened and inequalities made to appear as natural. Freud's insight gave rise to the notion that emancipation was possible by means of critical insight into relationships of power, the strength of which lie in the fact that they are being colluded with. The above theories are vital in understanding a critical orientation to research.

A critical theory of society 'took its bearing' from Marx's critique of political economy (Connerton 1978: 204). Marx believed that the conditions of material production under capitalism were self-undermining. He argued that the bourgeoisie could only

remain in power by constantly creating new methods of production. However, new technologies of production require fewer labourers which results in labour being 'set free' (Braverman 1974). A continuous availability of surplus labour then 'holds down' pay rates and ultimately exacerbates the plight of the poor. Marx believed this would lead to revolution. Instead it has become the means of justifying the status quo. Previously the forces of production offered grounds for a critique of the power structure of society; now they provide a basis for its legitimation (Connerton 1978: 26-27). Production is seen as an exorable given and constructed as in everyone's interests. The Frankfurt School saw the self-reinforcing qualities in the social infrastructure and attempted to develop a more sophisticated study of ideologies than that provided by Marx.

Critical theory's contemporary exponent is Habermas. While Marx links social and educational problems to forces of capitalist production and class conflict, Habermas (1984) argues that history develops through communication and culture as well as through work. This view is especially relevant in post-modern societies which are increasingly seen as information and communication societies (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). Habermas advocates a non-reductionist view of knowledge that recognizes itself as part of the historical process (Connerton 1978). People, including researchers, are all producers of common forms of social and historical reality. Critical theory views the meaning of ideas as historically contextualized and thus restricted in scope: ideas can only have a specific meaning in certain socio-historical circumstances and can only be understood and believed (accepted as commonsense) by those who inhabit those particular socio-historical circumstances (Hughes & Sharrock 1997: 186). For example, the concept of the "educated subject" has not remained constant, but has changed as the systems that regulate the person have shifted within changing social circumstances (Popkewitz 1995).

Social, political and cultural states of affairs are invariably the outcome of contingent historical chains of events that are presented as natural and hence, self justifying, and are eventually experienced as natural (Olivier 2003). Historical relativism, which holds that one cannot judge the past because it is different, supports this naturalization of the 'way things are'. One of the tenets of critical theory⁵ is that one

⁵ Although the term 'critical theory' is used in the singular, it would be more realistic to use the plural as there are as many critical theories as there are thinkers and writers working within a critical orientation.

cannot distance the present from the past and research conducted within a critical orientation aims to disabuse readers of the erroneous belief that the state of affairs it investigates is natural.

Meanings are constructed through language which is constitutive of social life (Fairclough 1992). That is, language is the medium through which social life is constructed since it functions as an instrument that is used to reflect, shape and manipulate people’s beliefs, actions and relationships. An example of the power of words on the micro level is the way in which the meaning of the ‘Seven Commandments’ in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* are changed from totally prohibiting certain actions to condoning them – simply by adding a few words⁶:

Original prohibition	Addition which condones
No animal shall sleep in a bed	[with sheets]
No animal shall drink alcohol	[to excess]
No animal shall kill any other animal	[without cause]

And at a macro level, Pennycook (2003) points out that for the colonizer to construct him/herself as enlightened and progressive someone else had to be constructed as savage, or primitive and backward. Regrettably this is a discourse which persists today. Another example at a macro level is the way in which modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge claims and practices of the human sciences. Through language, the human sciences have established certain norms and these are legitimized and reproduced through the practices of teachers, social workers, doctors, judges, policemen and administrators (Sarup 1993: 72).

On the other hand, Phillips (2000) reminds us that language is imprecise and lacks a systematic foundation. Gee (1998: 76) picks up this point in noting that “words have no meaning in and of themselves and by themselves apart from other words”. On one level, language is representation: a word represents a concept or an idea, and ideas are often abstract. The meaning of words is not fixed, but can be manipulated

⁶ This example is taken from one of the examination papers (KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2, 2001) which are the focus of this study.

through combinations, which then alter the meanings given. This is illustrated by de Saussure's (1966) identification of the concept of the "sign". For de Saussure, a sign is constituted by the relationship between a signifier and the signified. The signified is the specific abstract concept that is indicated through the interpretation of the signifier. Signs are recognized through their difference from all other signs, a process which then makes meaning possible. However, if one signifier is related to another through difference, then the link between them remains unstable and subject to unpredictable change (Phillips 2000). Derrida (in Kincheloe & McLaren 1998: 264) talks of difference and deferral: "the meaning of a word is constantly deferred because it can have meaning only in relation to its difference from other words within a given system of language". In other words, meaning is never fixed, but always "temporary and relative" (Angelil-Carter *et al.* 1994). Angelil-Carter *et al.* note that this "slippage" means that meanings can be continually redefined, reinterpreted, reconstructed and deconstructed. Gee (1998) explains that what one means by a word depends on which other words one has available and which other words this particular word is meant to exclude, or not exclude. Gee refers to this as the "exclusion principle". Meaning is thus always (in part) a matter of intended exclusions/inclusions within an assumed semantic field (Gee 1998: 73). One can only make judgments about which words are excluded/included by guessing – what Gee refers to as the "guessing principle". Gee (1998: 74) points out that people who belong to the same or a similar social group will make better guesses. These guesses are linked to assumptions about the relevant context and thus change as the context changes (the "context principle") (Gee 1998: 75). Language users from minority groups often do not have access to this knowledge.

Basing his argument on Giddens's (1981) notion of the "duality of structure", Fairclough (1985: 746) emphasizes that what occurs at a micro level "contributes to the reproduction of 'macro' structures". For example, intelligible concepts such as right and wrong are based on assumptions that are culturally produced and accepted. (This links to Habermas's theory that history develops through communication and culture.) Right and wrong are concepts that rely on what critics and philosophers have called false consciousness because each culture supports "a dominant version of things that is generally accepted as true" (Phillips 2000:101). This dominant version of reality is ideological and ideologies have cognitive functions. According to van Dijk (1995), ideologies are seen to function as the 'interface' between the cognitive representations and processes underlying discourse and action, on the one hand, and the societal position and interests of social groups,

on the other. Or more simply stated, ideologies are systems at the basis of the socio-political cognitions of groups (Lau & Sears 1986 and Rosenberg 1988 cited in van Dijk 1995). They control evaluative beliefs – the social opinions shared by the members of a group. They control how people plan and understand their social practices. Therefore they control the structures of text and talk. This conception of ideology allows one to establish the crucial link between macro-level analyses of groups, social formations and structures and micro-level studies of situated, individual interaction and discourse (van Dijk 1995). Foucault highlighted the importance of smaller, discrete social units such as hospitals, mental asylums, schools, prisons, universities and analysed their specific social logic and local effects (cited in Seidman 1998: 245) in relation to these macro structures.

It would thus appear that ideologies are inextricably woven into and represented in particular cultures. Through complex, long-term processes of socialization and other forms of social information processing, ideologies are gradually acquired by members of a group or culture (van Dijk 1995). Ideologies are self-serving and define relationships of power which are based on privileged access to socially valued resources such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education or knowledge. Gee (1996, 1998) understands ideology as a social theory that contains, or implies beliefs / claims about the ways in which goods (wealth, status, power, control, 'good' schools, 'good' jobs) are distributed in society and notes that ideologies are "tacit, removed or deferred and self-advantaging...and leave us complicit with and thus responsible for the evil in the world" (1998: 21).

Phillips (2000: 109) links false consciousness and ideology: "Ideology is a false consciousness that alienates subjects from political and economic reality (and their own interests), both veiling the reality of social relations and naturalizing the alienated condition". This occurs because the relationship between proposition and fact in ideology is mediated by representation and ideological effects are then treated as objects of knowledge when they are not. Through language, therefore, false pictures (ideologies) of the world are created. These false pictures are accepted as the dominant version of reality, namely, what is valuable, worthwhile and acceptable.

Within a critical orientation to research, groups of people cannot be considered separately from their social contexts (Fairclough 1985; van Dijk 1995). This is because in their everyday actions people act out the social structures, affirming their own statuses and roles and establishing a shared system of value and knowledge. The critical theorist must therefore view society as a totality (Guba & Lincoln 1998).

Since society comprises practices, whether industrial, agricultural or scientific, the social, economic, political and cultural overlap and invest one another. Therefore, research practice is not independent of other social practices, including politics (cf. the introduction to this chapter). As Nel (1995: 127) points out, the concept of totality is itself a concept of history. The critical researcher must take account of historical, social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender antecedents of the studied situation and the extent to which the enquiry might “provide... a stimulus to ... the transformation of the existing structure” (Guba & Lincoln 1998: 213).

History gives rise to social processes that are maintained by society. According to Fish (1989), “reality is the result of the social processes accepted as normal in a specific context, and knowledge claims are intelligible and debatable only within a particular context or community”. Gee (1998: 78) refers to our perceptions of “typical, normal reality” as cultural models and notes that these vary across different cultural groups and change with time and other changes in the society. What is taken to be self-evident reality, according to Schwandt (1994), is the product of complicated discursive practices, or discourse (Foucault 1972).

Individuals play many different roles in society, for example, mother, lawyer, sportswoman, housewife. Within each role there is an accepted way of ‘doing things’ – of behaving. When the individual behaves in these normative ways, that is, uses the language of the role and acts in the particular ways associated with the role, then sh/e is operating within a discourse. In any given discourse there are normative “ways of talking” (Fairclough 1985: 752) and acting (Fairclough 1997), which indicate “membership” of the discourse. How the individual acts and uses language in a discourse is ideologically determined through the values and perspectives of the particular society. Discourses depend on ideology for their existence; they are the medium through which power operates (Foucault 1972; Gee 1996; Fairclough 1997). Membership of particular discourses in society privilege dominant groups of people. Therefore a discourse is an ideologically prescribed ‘way of being’ that advantages dominant groups in society and, by implication, disadvantages other groups.

Social life is made up of practices which consist, in part, of discursive events. Each practice also has a reflexive dimension: it includes representations of what the practice consists of (a theory of what is done) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). Thus discourse is a semiotic element of social practice. Any practice “articulates together diverse elements of life... and therefore diverse mechanisms” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 37). Discourse is one such element with its own mechanism. As

with knowledge, discourses are dependent on time (history) and place (context). Different discourses emerge at different times in history and change over time to serve powerful interests (Foucault 1972). In this regard, Mbembe (2001: 103) points out that state power creates its own world of meanings through administrative and bureaucratic practices and that this "master code" governs the logics that underlie all other meanings within the society. He adds that state power institutionalizes this world of meanings as a "socio-historical world", making that world real and turning it into part of people's commonsense, by instilling it into their minds and integrating it into the period's consciousness. The narratives, vocabulary and texts (that is, the discourses) circulating within the society are invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that, in the case of the "postcolony" (which could describe South Africa), one is often officially forbidden (through the legal system) to challenge or depart from them.

For purposes of the research reported upon in this thesis, and as already indicated, it is important to bear in mind that critical theory views discourses as inherently ideological in that they involve a set of values and viewpoints about the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods (money, power, status). Discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in its various norms and conventions of use; by class; and by relations specific to a particular discipline or institution (Fairclough 1997). Fairclough views the participants in a discipline, or institution, as a 'speech community' with its own discourse. The institution determines who may act when and where for which norms and goals and thus provides a 'frame for action' without which 'subjects' could not act, but it thereby constrains them to act within the frame (Fairclough 1997). Fairclough prefers to use the term "subject" rather than member, since the subject is qualified to act through being constrained. However, "ideology produces subjects [who] appear not to be 'subjected'", but free (Fairclough 1985: 754).

The constraints placed on the subject are the conditions (rules) imposed on individuals who use the discourse, whether the discourse of the institution, or on the micro-level, of the discipline. According to Foucault (1972: 224), "Disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse". There is also a certain ritual to be followed: "Ritual defines the qualifications required of the speaker" (Foucault 1972: 225). It lays down which things can be said by which kinds of persons, what can be talked about and what can be said about the things that can be talked about (Hughes & Sharrock 1997). All communication has the effect of

producing 'others' who are identified as not being members of the relevant 'speech community' (Scollon 2001: 7). By doing and saying the right thing, one expresses the right values, beliefs and attitudes and thus gains access to the discourse (van Dijk 1993; Gee 1996). Behaving in these prescribed ways also displays membership in a particular social group or network. The discourse specifies roles and facilitates shared understandings about how far roles and rules can be bent or stretched (Maybin 2000: 200). Scollon (2001) uses the term "nexus of practice" to refer to the many social practices that make up a discourse. These practices are linked to many other practices, discursive and non-discursive, and nexus of practice is thus unbounded.

The speech community acts in particular ways and settings to maintain these 'norms' and 'standards'. Peter and Favret (2001: 183) speak of acts as discourses because through acts, people speak. The individual who is part of the speech community (institution) is shaped or modified by the discourse of the institution and must learn to "see things" in the way the institution sees them and acquire the "ways of talking" and acting of the particular institution (Fairclough 1997). That is, the individual acquires the ideological norms of the institution through the discourse. There are particular nuances of behaviour, language use and action that appear to exist "in the air" (Pennycook 2003), that separate those members who make up the core from those who are on the margins. These nuances are so subtle that they are not definable (Gee 1996). According to Foucault (1972), "the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures" and consequently certain individuals and sometimes groups of individuals are excluded. The discourse acts as a gate keeper, only letting in those who manage to control it successfully (Angelil-Carter *et al.* 1994:102-103). Those groups in society, or in the institution who are dominant, have the power to impose the standards and norms of their group on others who are less powerful and to withhold certain "goods" from them (Gee 1998; Van Dijk 1995; Angelil-Carter *et al.* 1994). Thus it is that certain groups in society are privileged over others. What exacerbates the situation is that this privileging is "reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable" (Kincheloe & McLaren 1998: 274). Their minds are influenced in such a way that they accept dominance and act in the interests of the powerful out of their own free will. This is called hegemony (Gramsci 1971; Fairclough 1985; van Dijk 1993). Hegemony is dominance obtained by consent, rather than force, of one group or class over the others (Femia 1981). The individual consents because s/he sees no realistic alternative. Language serves a hegemonic

function. One of the functions of a dominant discourse (e.g. racism, sexism) is to manufacture consensus, acceptance and legitimacy of dominance (van Dijk 1993). Thus it can be seen that a dialectical relationship exists between discourse and social structure (Fairclough 1992).

The worldview of a critical researcher thus includes the belief that history and society give rise to power relations that are dialectical in nature and thus self-perpetuating. For example, many other domains are mediated and transmitted by educational institutions and educational institutions are also involved in educating people about the social order they live in.

Critical enquiry aims at understanding the various forms in which power works and how the marginalization of people is constructed (Popkewitz 1995). Popkewitz (1995: 140) points out that one of the forms is “the discursive practices and performances of schooling”. According to Nel (1995: 135), education is integral in perpetuating existing inequalities. Nel notes, for example, how education socializes children into accepting the lower status of working class sectors. However, as Willis (1977) argues, oppressed people can also create a culture of opposition that ensures their continued oppression. The young working-class men in Willis’s (1977) study knew that only a very few among them would succeed through the education system, so they sought their futures in skilled manual work outside the school system. They developed a hard, masculine, working-class identity for themselves and because they rejected anything ‘soft’ – including any kind of strong politics or social theory – they were forced to accept a very conventional destiny for themselves as hard, working-class men doing hard, working-class jobs. Willis (1977: 129) thus holds that a counter-school culture exists among the working classes that “identifies the false individualistic promises of dominant ideology as they operate in the school”. For the working class the cultural is in a battle with language (Willis 1977: 124). Members of the working class thus refuse to compete and thereby collude in their own suppression. In this way they can be seen as agents of their own working class positions.

According to Foucault (1972: 227), “Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it”; and Fairclough (1997) notes that inculcating particular discursive practices in educational organizations also inculcates particular cultural values and meanings, social relationships and identities. In addition, the media, money and the administrative apparatus prevent the relevant public from reaching

consensual decisions about the governance of institutions which are central to their lives, for example, the school (Robinson 1993: 233). Critical theory is necessary for education because a 'culture of power' exists in society in general and in the educational environment in particular (Delpit 1988; Fien & Hillcoat 1996). Critical research must be "connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere of society" (Kincheloe & McLaren 1998:264). Educators adopting a critical perspective challenge the capitalist notion that schools should produce individuals who will maintain the economic, cultural and bureaucratic status quo. Taking its lead from Freire, critical theory is related to "a pedagogy of resistance" (Lincoln & Denzin 1998). Kincheloe and McLaren (1998: 262) see schools as becoming institutions for "critical empowerment rather than subjugation". Schools are seen as sites for class dominance and struggle. What is particularly pertinent to the research described in this thesis is the realization that "the success of educational intervention will be constrained by the wider economic context" (Robinson 1993: 228). Anticipated changes in the linguistic and discursive needs of work are a major factor in shaping language education in schools (Fairclough 1997). This point will be addressed in the following section, which explores what the claims to knowledge are in the 21st century.

3.4 Claims to Knowledge

According to Nel (1995), reflecting on knowledge is central to the work of critical theorists. Thus far (cf. 3.3) it has been noted that beliefs about the nature of reality (knowledge) are inventions of the mind and depend on socio-historical context. Popkewitz (1995) refers to knowledge as systems of ideas. Ideology, too, has been defined as the system of ideas at the basis of an economic or political theory. Knowledge has also been defined as the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual. Knowledge is identified with the official view (Olson & Astington 1993). There is thus a definite link between ideology and knowledge. The fact that people construct knowledge rather than find or discover it and that they do this through language (Hughes, 1980) explains this link. In the words of Foucault, "language creates or produces the things whereof it speaks" (in Hughes & Sharrock 1997:186). Although these 'things' are based on assumptions, they are accepted as truths and become the norms and standards (ideologies) by which people live. However, these ideologies must be distinguished from knowledge (Fairclough 1985).

Fairclough (1985: 742) argues that it is unacceptable to reduce all of that which is taken-for-granted background knowledge to knowledge since beliefs, values and

ideologies are then subsumed as knowledge: they become part of the 'knowledge base' and are seen as "based in the nature of things or people", when in fact they are "in the interests of classes or other groupings" (Fairclough 1985: 746). The world is always represented from the perspective of a particular interest (Fairclough 1985; Lather 1986). Through this distortion, which obtains in the 'taken-for-granted' knowledge attributable to each participating individual, groups of people are marginalized and/or excluded from goods (Gee 1998).

Language "creates distinctions, differences and categories that define and create the world and whose rules are continually changing in relation to shifting circumstances" (Popkewitz 1995: 142). This privileging of language in social inquiry has been called the "linguistic turn". According to Popkewitz, the notion of text is central here.

Text in this sense refers to the link between social actions and background knowledge. Background knowledge is contained in texts which prescribe our social behaviour or actions. The individual refers to these texts to create meaning within social actions. To be social an action must be communicated and there must be a shared system of meaning (Scollon 2001). In this regard Fairclough (1992) sees any discursive event (instance of discourse) as being simultaneously an instance of discursive practice, an instance of social practice and a piece of text. The identity function relates to the way in which social identities are 'set up' in discourse. The relational function relates to how social relationships between participants are carried out, enacted and negotiated; and the ideational function relates to the way in which texts signify the world and its processes (that is, construct 'reality'). Halliday (1978) also distinguishes a textual function: how bits of information are backgrounded or foregrounded, taken as given or presented as new and how a part of a text is linked to preceding and following parts of the text and to the social situation outside the text. 'Text' comes from the Latin *texere* (to weave). How an individual acts in the present relies on the interwovenness of the various texts with which she is familiar. The individual cannot make sense of the world (create meaning or be understood) without relying on these texts. Texts always constitute additions to existing "chains of speech communication" (Bakhtin 1986: 94) consisting of prior texts to which they respond.

Literature makes use of the term "intertextuality" (Kristeva 1986), which is the explicit presence of one text (or in the case of social action, many texts) within another; what Fairclough (1992:102) refers to as the insertion of history (society) into a text. At the micro level, in 'my' discourse it is the presence of the specific words of another (as in reported speech), or at the macro level, the presence of different discourses (referred

to as “interdiscursivity”) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 49). Micro actions, or events, can thus not be regarded as simply of local significance since they are linked to the macro (Fairclough 1985; Van Dijk 1995) and contribute to the reproduction of macro structures. Fairclough (1985: 747) sees the institution as a “pivot” between the social formation and the “particular social event or action”. In simple terms the social formation determines the social institution and the social institution determines social action.

At the micro level, as far back as mediaeval times, if a man’s speech could not be said to form part of the common discourse of men, the man was seen as mad (Foucault 1972: 217). Knowledge in the mediaeval period, was perceived as being “an outer expression of an inner relationship” (Bernstein 1996: 87). In other words, what man experienced was translated into knowledge. By the nineteenth century, unreason had been constituted as mental illness (Caputo 1993). Bernstein (1996: 84) argues that Christianity generated a dislocation between inner self and outer practice to open up a new existential self (analogous with the metaphor of three), whereas in Judaism there are two, God and Man, since it is an unmediated religion. Thus an exteriorization of knowledge occurred with respect to the “knower” (Lyotard 1987: 4). Although knowledge was built on a religious foundation (since the Church was all powerful), gradually, over several hundred years as the Church lost its power, official knowledge became linked to a “humanizing secular principle” (Bernstein 1996: 86). Western cultural tradition distinguishes between the individual and society, “between the inner being and the outer world, between cognition conceived of as within the head and social interaction conceived of as of the outer world” (Christie 1989: 25).

What is valued as knowledge depends on where humankind is in its history. Knowledge is thus provisional and multifaceted (Popkewitz 1995). For example, Braverman (1974) and Willis (1977) contend that since standardization occurred in industry many jobs have become basically meaningless and cannot offer intrinsic satisfaction as they require very little skill or training. In addition, Lyotard (1987) explains that the status of knowledge altered as societies entered the postindustrial age and cultures the postmodern age and Holtzhausen (2002) argues that the transition from an industrial to a knowledge society has been a major challenge since the 1990s. Suffice to say that the nature of knowledge is changing along with the general transformation brought about by the advancements in technology just as the

way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited is changing (Lyotard 1987: 4).

Knowledge can be moved about and even created. It is divorced from the knower: from persons, their commitments, their personal dedications, which become impediments, restrictions on the flow of knowledge (Bernstein 1996: 87). Knowledge is and will continue to be produced to be sold. The "market principle" has dehumanized knowledge and it has become an "informational commodity indispensable to productive power" and crucial to worldwide competition for power (Lyotard 1987: 4). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) interpret Lyotard as contending that modern society has generated universalizing forms of knowledge (theory, science) that tyrannically suppress difference. Lyotard (1984 cited in Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999) objects to discourse that universalizes; for example, using 'we' to construct a universal subject, 'humankind', according to Lyotard, represses difference.

Where does education stand with regard to the present day status of knowledge? With the techno-economic shift, society has become post-industrial and knowledge-based (Holtzhausen 2002). Some industries now produce knowledge (for example, software, biotechnology and information technology hardware) and others manage or convey information (for example, telecommunications, banking, insurance, law, medicine). The focus of this second group is the effective handling and managing of information (Holtzhausen 2002). Existing knowledge can be used to create new knowledge. With globalization and internationalization the emphasis is on developing a highly skilled, 'self-programmable' labour force. Fueling this particular fire is the discourse that would have us believe that Africa has been bypassed by the globalization phenomena and is increasingly marginalized (see for example, Castells 2001a.). Higher education in South Africa is implicated in this discourse as evidenced by the far-reaching changes made to the system in order to make the processes of knowledge production and knowledge acquisition more efficient.

The new emphasis is on learning to learn, rather than memorizing facts. Hall (2001) argues that the Freirian approach (that is, empowering people to express what they know but cannot formulate) was developed for a world where the amount of information was not expanding at today's rate and was not so crucial for economic survival. Now success in the "network society" (Castells 2001c.) depends on learning how to learn and relearn, and having access to new knowledge and training. This new focus affects developed and developing countries differently, and in a

developing South Africa is a cause for concern in further and higher education (Holtzhausen 2002).

From an academic perspective knowledge is viewed as a body of disciplines. Every discipline recognizes true and false propositions and for a discipline to exist there must be the possibility of formulating fresh propositions (Foucault 1972: 223). However, to belong to a discipline, a proposition must fit into a certain type of theoretical field, which is perhaps why, according to Gee (1998:13), all claims to know are based on theories. (This obviously also applies to any theory upon which research is based.)

Furthermore, what is regarded as knowledge must be legitimated (Lyotard 1987: 8). Power is used to define what is acceptable knowledge, and power operates through discourse (Foucault 1972; Fairclough 1997; Gee 1996). Discourses are “embedded in social institutions” (Gee 1994: 128) where particular constraints arise and “certain classes of statements (sometimes only one)” are privileged (Lyotard 1987: 17). Access to specific forms of discourse therefore, is itself a power resource (van Dijk 2001). For Lyotard (1987: 9) knowledge and power are two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? Lyotard appears to be saying that those with power have access to knowledge and can legitimate what knowledge is. In this context knowledge is the medium for sustaining power.

In 1979 Lyotard predicted that learning would cease to fall within “the purview of the State” (1987: 5) where it is seen as the “brain or mind of society”, but that society would increasingly come to be seen as existing and progressing only if the messages circulating within it are information-rich and easy to decode. This prediction is especially apt in the present information technology (IT) and globalization age. Information-processing machines store data: however, having access to these data banks is not enough. What is important is being able to actualize the relevant data and organize it in a new way into an efficient strategy for solving a problem (Lyotard 1987: 51-52). Reinforcing technology legitimates knowledge and higher education (HE) is now called upon to supply the social system with these skills (Lyotard 1987: 48) and to play a new role in improving the system’s performance. According to Castells (2001b: 207), the role of the university is changing to that of being a productive force in the informational economy. The pervasive, persuasiveness of this particular discourse is evidenced by the fact that HE systems the world over are acting upon it.

The education system in South Africa needs to take cognizance of the changes that are occurring and the new way in which knowledge is perceived. Bernstein (1996: 87) states: "The principles of the market and its managers are more and more the managers of the policy and practices of education". Researchers must also keep abreast of these changes: "Market relevance is becoming the key orientating criterion for the selection of discourses, their relation to each other, their forms and their research" (Bernstein 1996: 87). Unless research sectors can show how they contribute to the "optimization of the system's performance" (Lyotard 1987: 47) they will not receive subsidy. Power relations of struggle are involved between the discourses of the market and those of education. This is because the discourses of the market and education have their distinct ideological positions and within the institution, are connected to class struggle (Fairclough 1985: 751). Universities have always been mechanisms of selection and formation of dominant elites and have always played an ideological role (Castells 2001b: 206). However, the relationship is not necessarily a direct or transparent one, since ideology is representation of the 'world' from the perspective of a particular interest. The critique of institutional discourses is part of the critique of social institutions and the social formation. Discourses which construct the need for examinations such as the Senior Certificate as well as the examinations themselves must be analyzed with reference to their place within the institutional matrix (Fairclough 1985: 759).

The critical analysis of discourses (CDA) is thus a relevant method for this study. According to Fairclough (1985:747), "critique is making visible the interconnectedness of things" (and for things, insert discourses). CDA questions how discourses cumulatively contribute to the reproduction of macro structures (Fairclough 1985: 753); how they perpetuate the status quo of elitism and marginality in spite of public rhetoric for inclusion and change (Preece 1998: 8).

A discussion of the methods of analysis used in the research described in this thesis follows.

3.5 Methods of Analysis

3.5.1 Discourse analysis

Michael Foucault, the social theorist, has been a major influence in the development of discourse analysis (DA). DA focuses on the social effects of discourse, or as Fairclough (1997: 7) puts it, "analyses how texts work within socio-cultural practice". Fairclough (1997: 35-6) notes that for DA to be critical it must make the link between

discourse and how it affects social structures. According to Foucault (1972, 1982), discourses are implicated in relations of power that regulate what is perceived of as 'reasonable' and 'true' because, as mentioned above, power is innate to the structure of discourse. Since language is inextricably bound up with ideology and cannot be analyzed or understood apart from it (Gee 1996), the researcher needs an analytical framework for studying the connections between language, power and ideology. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method for studying language in its relation to power and ideology.

When using CDA the researcher examines texts to address questions related to meaning. Since texts as narratives are used by individuals to create meaning in social action (cf. 3.4), Fairclough (1992) believes that it is sensible to assume that any sort of textual feature is potentially significant in CDA. The researcher using CDA would examine the form and organization (texture) of texts and also analyze what was absent from texts and the absences in texts. Gee (1998) refers to this as the exclusion principle (cf. 3.3).

The rules of a discourse are not explicit. The task of discourse analysis is to uncover the rules and also the power behind the discourse (Angelil-Carter *et al.* 1994). Social power is based on privileged access to socially valued resources such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education or knowledge (van Dijk 1993). CDA has to focus on the discursive strategies that legitimate control by elitist groups / institutions.

It has been noted (cf. 3.4) that texts as narratives are referred to by individuals to create meaning in social actions. Social actions tend to cluster in terms of institutions, for example, the church, the school, the court. In analyzing the texts of institutions, one can address questions of meaning. Texts are seen as ideological in so far as they sustain and/or undermine power relations. Power is conceptualized in terms of the inequalities between people in discourse events and their unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed in particular socio-cultural contexts (Fairclough 1997: 1-2). Pupils' lack of control over texts in schools (that is, over what they are expected to learn and how they are examined) is an example, although Willis (1977) would argue that pupils choose to 'set aside' this learning by constructing themselves as 'other' to it. In so doing, many forms of the conventional, dominant ideology – particularly as mediated through the school – are "minced up", inverted or defeated by the counter-school culture (Willis 1977: 160).

By focusing attention on social institutions and their associated discourses (circulating in the texts and narratives of the institution), it is possible to explicate tacit ideologies (Gee 1998). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be used to “denaturalize” ideologies by showing how discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure, yet is also socially constitutive. Social structures determine the properties of discourse and discourse, in turn, determines social structures (Fairclough 1985). Just as one is typically unaware of one’s ways of talking, unless for some reason they are subjected to conscious scrutiny, so one is typically unaware of what ways of seeing (what ideological representations) underlie one’s talk. Ideological representations come to be seen as norms and therefore go unchallenged. They become “naturalized” (appearing as commonsense) and “opaque” (no longer visible as ideologies) (Fairclough 1992: 87). These ideologies are discernible in the discourses of the institution, that is, in the texts of the institution. When ideologies appear as commonsense they go unchallenged and this is the role of CDA.

Fairclough (1985) views social institutions as comprising diverse “ideological-discursive formations” (IDFs), which represent the different groups in the institution. Each IDF has its speech norms and embedded in these norms, its own ideological norms. One of the IDFs may be dominant in the institution and one dominated. A dominant IDF has the capacity to “naturalize” ideologies, that is, to win acceptance for them as non-ideological “commonsense”. An example is schools taking the position that ‘standard’ English should be taught and that pupils are entitled to education in standard English. In this example standard English is the dominant (seen as normal and naturalized) variety and other varieties are dominated (marginalized, seen as alternative). From this position other varieties of English are seen as appropriate in certain contexts under certain conditions. Fairclough (1997: 225) calls this “dressing up inequality as diversity”. How a language variety comes to be seen as standard is the result of ideology, which comes into being through the “opaque and murky domain of power” (Mbembe 2001: 14). Standardization of language and of assessment is imposed by those who have power (Fairclough 1989: 22). Fairclough (1989: 33) describes the type of power leading to actions like standardization and assessment, as ideological power: the power to project one’s practices as universal and commonsense. Tester and test taker use different social constructions to understand any given context because often they have learned in different contexts using different processes. Therefore, their situational and experiential knowledge is not the same (Blunt 2000: 33).

Educational practices constitute a core domain of linguistic and discursive power and of the engineering of discursive practices (Fairclough 1997: 220). Fairclough notes that inculcating particular discursive practices in educational organizations also inculcates particular cultural values and meanings, social relationships and identities. Furthermore, through ideology “uncertain and fragile cultural resolutions and outcomes” can be turned into “pervasive naturalism” (Willis 1977:162), leading to ‘naturalized’ social divisions. At the other extreme, knowledge that is constructed informally outside of the culture of school instruction is seen as threatening as it does not perpetuate the system. However, many other domains are mediated and transmitted by educational institutions and educational institutions are also involved in educating people about the sociolinguistic order they live in. Furthermore, anticipated changes in the linguistic and discursive needs of work are a major factor in shaping language education in schools (an example of the dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure).

This is a good time to engage in CDA, since the shift in focus of education in South Africa means that what was previously seen as normal is being challenged at all levels, including at the level of education. However, researchers should acknowledge that the quest for knowledge is tentative. Researchers need to demonstrate their appreciation that their claims represent a limited perspective and are not disinterested. In this regard they need to differentiate ideology from knowledge. Unless researchers are aware of the ideological dimensions of discourse they may unconsciously be implicated in reproducing ideologies since naturalization and opacity of the effects of discourse are parts of its features. It can be said that this is particularly true of CDA. When a researcher uses CDA, she analyses text (an interpretation) and uses language to represent her analysis (again an interpretation). This is problematic because she then makes claims about these interpretations, which have been inferred through recourse to the social conditions of production and interpretation (Fairclough 1993). The problem arises because the text is a product of the process of production and therefore one cannot directly extrapolate from the formal features of a text to social practices. Interviewing is an additional method that can be used by a researcher to explore the process of production. As discussed above (cf. 3.3), ideologies and the power relations that underlie them have a pervasive influence on discourse interpretation and production. The interviewees’ perspectives are thus essential to temper the presuppositions that are part of the researcher’s interpretations.

It is possible to conduct discourse analysis at many levels. The analysis conducted during this study did not involve a close analysis of the text, which necessitates concentrating on, for example, lexical items and transitivity / intransitivity to allow an interpretation of the institutional setting and situation type within which the interaction is occurring, but rather focused on identifying discourses at a broader level where it could be established which powerful agents' interpretations of language learning and assessment were being imposed on the ESL learner.

There is a dialectical play between insider and outsider views. The researcher cannot hold a totally insider view, nor a totally outsider one (Carspecken 1996: 189). We view reality from the outside while simultaneously being part of it. Ludic postmodernists (Carspecken 1996) argue that there is no reality and thus no truth, thereby undermining the critical value orientation and the value of research. I argue that since I am experiencing this state that I call reality there is no reason to accept the nihilistic effects of ludic postmodernism. While experiencing this reality it is perfectly possible to acknowledge that my reality has been 'languaged' into being and that my knowledge has been constructed. Notwithstanding the perspective that everything that is transformed into language becomes fiction (Krog 2003: 362), another perspective claims that there are certain truths which it is felt should always exist as truths. Critical realists (for example, Fairclough) argue that there is a reality that is sure. Krog (2003: 257) recounts how Mandela tells the same stories 'word for word' to undermine what he calls the "whole postmodern notion of ever-changing texts". Nihilistic (ludic) realism would have the researcher uncritically adopt postmodern ideas / insights; however I resist this position. A postmodern perspective is itself ideological and constructed.

3.5.2 Interviewing

Proponents of the critical orientation would see researcher and participants engaging in reciprocal reflexivity and critique (Lather 1986: 265) so that the final interpretation of the research is negotiated between researcher and participants. This goal is difficult to achieve if researcher and respondent come from discrete, disparate contexts. It is possible in the qualitative research interview when researcher and participant are both members of the discourse under discussion; when respondent and researcher understand, if not share, the social constructions each hold for the specific context under discussion.

Interviewing is a qualitative research method acknowledged to be subjective (cf. for example, Merriam 1988). This becomes clear when examining Kvale's (1996) "miner/traveler" analogy. The interviewer can either be seen as a miner who uncovers objective facts or essential meaning in the subject's interior, or as a traveler who undertakes a journey. In the first view the knowledge the miner uncovers is perceived as "contaminated" by the miner and in transcribing it from oral to written mode it is "purified". However, according to Lather (1986), there is no neutral research. Scientific knowledge is not free from social construction.

On the other hand, seeing the interviewer as a traveller fits in with a critical orientation. Kvale's (1996) traveller acknowledges that what is related during a research interview is a story that must be interpreted and understood. The "potentialities of meaning... are differentiated and unfolded" (Kvale 1996: 4) through the interviewer's interpretations, which results in a new narrative. This process is reminiscent of the way in which different discourses can be brought to the interpretation of a text resulting in a new, hybrid text (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). Through conversation, respondent and interviewer arrive at new understandings of and insights into "natural-seeming" matters. A post-modern approach emphasizes the constructive nature of the knowledge created through the interaction of interviewer and interviewee (Kvale 1996). The interview is a reflexive process that can lead to new ways of self-understanding and self-determination (Kvale 1996; Lather 1986). Furthermore, to be considered empirically accountable researchers must offer grounds for the acceptance of their descriptions and analyses. In taking into account the critical commentary of others (in this study, the examiners), the researcher is engaging in an analysis of understandings that results in a modification of the original analysis. The researcher is also addressing the producer of the text (in this case, the SC examination paper) to establish empirically what s/he intended.

3.6 Data Collection

I received permission to attend the Annual Meeting of Examiners and Moderators of language papers in the Senior Certificate Examination held in Johannesburg in May 2001. At this meeting I was able to collect the 2001 ESL literature papers (Paper 2) as well as the national language and comprehension (Paper 1) papers for both HG and SG. At the subsequent meeting in 2002, my supervisor collected copies of the 2002 ESL literature papers on my behalf.

I decided to focus on the papers of six of the provinces as a representative sample. This decision was concomitant on my being able to interview the examiners who had set the papers. Altogether I conducted an analysis of 14 examination papers: eleven literature papers and three language papers (cf. Appendix G for a list of the papers analysed.) Prior to the interviews, I conducted a preliminary analysis of these papers, examining each carefully in order to identify an initial set of ideas. Ideas that related to each other were grouped together in categories. My understanding of these initial categories was then further developed through extensive engagement with the literature in a number of fields including New Literacy Studies, assessment and applied language teaching. As a result of this engagement, some categories were collapsed while others were expanded until I was eventually able to arrive at the identification of a number of discourses.

The process followed to arrive at the categories was thus 'bottom-up' and used induction (Cohen & Manion 1994). This entails studying a number of individual cases (the various questions on the examination papers) to arrive at hypotheses (the categories) which could then be used to identify the discourses constructing the needs of ESL learners. Lines were drawn between categories to show interrelationships. However, the data material belonging to one category could not be separated from that belonging to another, since each analysed examination paper contained several of the identified topics. This finding is consistent with CDA since discourses are eclectic; they overlap and influence one another (cf. chap 4: 4.1), although for the sake of clarity and understanding in this thesis it was necessary to identify them separately.

All six examiners agreed to be interviewed and five were interviewed face-to-face. The sixth was interviewed via e-mail (cf. Appendix E). Examiners' anonymity has been maintained through referring to them anonymously (e.g. Examiner A, Examiner B, etc.). A representative sample of the questions posed in the five face-to-face interviews was posed in the e-mail to the sixth examiner. This examiner answered the questions without having recourse to the interaction that usually accompanies an interview (cf. 3.5.2). Therefore this interview did not allow for negotiation as did the others. However, all the examiners came from similar contexts and therefore had an overlapping understanding of the social constructions of the context of the SC examination. The face-to-face context of the other five interviews allowed the respondents and me to arrive at new understandings of this context.

The interviews were semi-structured in that I asked certain specific questions of the respondents (cf. Appendix E). I also directed questions concerning specific examples that had been set by each interviewee in the examination papers. On the other hand, I allowed the respondents to diverge from the primary topic of discussion and relate their experiences of SC teaching and assessment and the processes surrounding the SC examination. The purpose of the interviews was both to “crystalise” (Richardson 2000) and challenge my initial identification of discourses.

Each examiner was interviewed privately and each interview was tape recorded. The examiners were asked a number of general questions to ascertain what their perceptions were on particular language issues, on who they perceived the ESL learner to be and what they perceived his/her needs to be at tertiary level. They were also asked specific questions pertaining to the questions that they had personally set on the particular examination papers under discussion and what need(s) of the ESL learner they felt specific questions were testing. The examination papers under discussion were physically present during the interviews so I could jot down along the margins any additional information pertaining to specific questions as well as new information revealed through the interview process.

Once the interviews were concluded I transcribed each one. I then conducted an analysis of the interview transcripts and collocated the topics identified in the examination papers. All the interviews facilitated modification of my original analysis of the examination papers (cf. 3.5.2). Although the examiners did not specifically identify the discourses manifested in the examination papers, their comments and explanations guided and corroborated my identification of these discourses. I feel it is important to state that the understandings generated through the interviews were invaluable in guiding my identification of the discourses of the examination papers manifest in the questions posed.

Thereafter, I conducted a second analysis of the examination papers, modifying the categories I had identified originally, where necessary, using the data from the transcriptions to aid understanding. This process was deductive (Cohen & Manion 1994): it was necessary to work from my original hypotheses (the categories) to their implications concerning the needs of ESL learners. From this point onward, analysis of the examinations papers was ongoing as once the discourses were identified, questions that exemplified each discourse had to be extracted from the examination papers for discussion.

3.7 Evaluating the Critical Orientation

Critical theory can be a first step towards forms of political action that can redress the injustices uncovered by research (Kincheloe & McLaren 1998: 265). Taking its lead from Freire, critical theory is viewed as “a pedagogy of resistance” (Lincoln and Denzin 1998). This is the ideal. Yet one of the criticisms of critical research is that many critical research projects stop short of the social action which is supposed to be one of the hallmarks of this tradition (Robinson 1993: 232). Lyotard (1987) argues that the critical model lost its theoretical standing and was reduced to the status of “a token protest raised in the name of man or reason or creativity, or again of some social category”. However, postmodernity has the ability to appropriate and incorporate resistance to itself (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 15) through discourse. The new world that is emerging and that we inhabit must be critically analyzed so that those aspects that enhance human life can be emphasized and those that are detrimental can be changed or mitigated.

Another argument is that the researcher cannot work for the oppressor and the oppressed simultaneously and so critical research bypasses the powerful in the process of change (Robinson 1993: 236). Although critical research recognizes that changed understandings do not in themselves change material circumstances, Robinson (1993: 237) points out that the powerful could be mistaken about their interests, and thus mistaken about their support of the status quo. Robinson (1993: 232) argues that it is the responsibility of the critical researcher to insist that relevant findings be acted upon to redress inequalities in the society and not to stop short of taking social action. However, van Dijk (1993) warns that modesty is required. The critical researcher must bear in mind that academic contributions may be marginal to the processes of change.

Critical research is itself a set of ideological practices (Kincheloe & McLaren 1998: 273). Therefore, another shortcoming of contemporary critical theory is that in attempting to analyze false consciousness, it only has at its disposal the very tool that leads to false consciousness: representation through language. However, discourses also function to undermine and expose power and make it possible to contest it. Angelil-Carter *et al.* (1994) note that discourse can be continually redefined, reinterpreted, reconstructed and deconstructed. This facility of discourse is also available to the critical analyst. The ‘trick’ is that the analyst needs to be able to work outside the rules of the discourse to be able to challenge the discourse’s rules (Angelil-Carter *et al.* 1994). Widdowson (1998) argues that critical analysts are

socially constructed to see things the way they do and are therefore not impartial. However, this could be said of all researchers. CDA is a method that allows researchers to distinguish ideology from knowledge so that they will not be unconsciously implicated in the reproduction of ideologies and the perpetuation of the status quo through their research.

Having said that, it must be borne in mind that any theory in the natural sciences is subjective and limited because the interpretation of the researcher is dependent on a particular worldview (cf. 3.1). However, Fairclough (1992) is critical of those critical linguists who do not perceive discourse as a 'site of struggle and conflict' which is linked to the wider social formation. Therefore, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 94) recommend that CDA be oriented to a "field of critical theorization and research" rather than a single theory.

Widdowson (1998) criticizes CDA for not being rigorous enough stating that no theoretical model exists to be applied and that CDA is an "ad hoc bricolage" that uses any concept that may usefully be applied. Section 3.3 explained how the theories of Kant, Freud and Marx contributed to the critical paradigm. Contributions in critical linguistics and semiotics of the structures of texts and image were also adopted in order to begin to analyse discourse structures and their relationship to social issues. Without these sophisticated theories no understanding of the complexities of social issues would be possible. In a multidisciplinary approach of this nature, distinctions between theory, description and 'application' become less relevant (van Dijk 1993). Widdowson (1998: 136) also maintains that the procedures of CDA are "reminiscent... of the interpretative ingenuity one associates with the discourse of literary criticism", but adds "this similarity is not recognized by the critical analysts themselves, except perhaps by Fowler" (Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew 1979 cited in Widdowson 1998). This similarity has perhaps not been recognized, or rather, acknowledged because of the procedures used by DA. DA uses description and interpretation to arrive at an understanding. CDA explains and critiques the ways in which dominant discourses (indirectly) influence socially shared knowledge, ideologies and attitudes (van Dijk 1993: 258-259). Widdowson (1998: 142) also criticizes the practitioners of CDA for not "relating texts to their conditions of production and consumption" although he acknowledges that Fairclough admits that he had not adequately done this in *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1997).

However, Fairclough (1985) advocates a "principled basis" for analyzing discourse entailing a sociological account of the institution, an account of its IDFs and an

ethnographic account of each IDF to arrive at a systematic understanding of how the discourse functions in the institution. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) set out a complex framework that gives a 'view' of what is involved in doing CDA. The first stage is identifying a discourse-related problem in social life (for example, the unmet needs of learners or the perceived needs of learners at tertiary level). Stage two necessitates analyzing the conjuncture; the overall frame of the social practice the discourse is located within. This entails analyzing the particular institution and the social and power relations within it. To do this one needs to analyze the discourse. Chouliaraki and Fairclough recommend that the discourse be based on a substantial body of material which can be seen as representing a particular domain of practice. The analyst should reveal how the genres and other discourses which are drawn upon are worked together in the textual process of the discourse: what voices of power it articulates together. The analyst also focuses on the reproductive effects of the discourse while taking into account that the particular example is being regarded as typical.

In the third stage the analyst must evaluate the practice in terms of its problematic results. Here caution is required. It is one thing to explain that a practice is a typical consequence of a network of practices that constitute the social formation, but quite another to develop a critique of the social formation that shows that the practice has an ideological function that makes it indispensable. The fourth stage involves a shift to the dialectical logic, that is, finding possible ways past the obstacles. Exposing the incompleteness and contradictoriness of the system will also reveal the gaps which keep systems open to transformative action. Lastly, Chouliaraki and Fairclough recommend reflexion of the analysis.

Widdowson (1998: 143) asserts that because writers of texts are never consulted about what they intended by their texts and readers' understanding is "assigned to them by proxy", analysts use the linguistic features of texts selectively to confirm their own prejudices. The approach adopted in this thesis attempts to counter this criticism by using interviews to consult with the authors of the texts. I would also argue that, in this instance, Widdowson is referring to a simplified version of CDA. He is operating at the micro-level whereas discourses operate at the macro-level. He looks at examples where CDA has been applied to newspaper articles and accuses the analyst of focusing on particular words / phrases to confirm a bias s/he has attributed in advance, rather than on other words and phrases that would not support this bias. Fairclough (1985:748) states categorically that micro actions / events contribute to

the reproduction of macro structures (cf. 3.3). For example, language can be identified as belonging to a particular discourse, which is linked to a particular social institution and in turn, to a particular social formation. Fairclough (1985) refers to this as the interdiscursivity of texts (discourses).

Because of the interdiscursivity of texts and the dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure, CDA can be used to understand how language works to position people in the interests of power. Janks (2001: 248) proposes using deconstruction and reconstruction because without reconstruction (what Janks sees as access or design), human agency is reduced. Human agency incorporates difference and diversity to expose the 'gaps' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999) in domination, which can lead to contestation and change.

Widdowson notes that Kress's account of a theory of language includes 'representation and transformation'. But language also includes reproduction: as a social practice language is shaped by social structures that it reproduces and transforms (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). Chouliaraki and Fairclough agree that analysts must be sensitive to the particularity and specificity of the language used, but not lose sight of the way in which it works within social structures, social relations and social processes which transcend the local.

Discourse is aimed at producing consensus (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 87); and more importantly, according to Lyotard (in Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 90), at repressing difference. However, critically analyzing the discourse reveals the differences. A writer's account of an event, or explanation for a certain frame of mind or set of ideas is an interpretation; a representation. Those who produce the discourse are presenting their accounts with their own interests at heart. One needs to analyse how competing discourses affect and infect one another and whose interests are being represented in the process.

An example of competing discourses is seen in the case of Pierre Reviere (1982), who in 1835 murdered his mother, sister and brother. This event gave rise to four different discourses: that of the judiciary (cantonal judge, prosecutor, presiding judge of the assize court, Minister of Justice); those of the country general practitioner and of the psychiatrists; those of the villagers with their mayor and parish priest; and that of the murderer himself, who during his detention wrote down the particulars and an explanation of his act. These four discourses appear to be speaking of one and the same thing, but in their totality are involved in a "battle among discourses and

through discourses” (Foucault 1982: x), each one competing to establish its legitimacy. The doctors were engaged in a combat among themselves, and with the judges and prosecution, and with Riviere; the crown lawyers had their own separate combat relating to the medical experts’ testimony, the comparatively novel use of extenuating circumstances and a range of cases of patricide that had taken place in the area twenty years previously; the villagers were attempting to defuse the terror of a crime committed in their midst and preserve the family honour; and Riviere’s testimony was an attempt to dispel the lie of his madness. Analysis of the confrontation of these discourses was undertaken to show them as “weapons of attack and defense in the relations of power and knowledge” (Foucault 1982: xi). What is interesting to note is that there were those who saw rationality in the beauty of Riviere’s text (and hence grounds for condemning him to death) and others who saw madness (and hence grounds for imprisoning him for life).

The discursive articulation of social space in contemporary society (this includes the space of economic exclusion which is undeniably linked to education) is not easily unraveled (Olivier 2001: 307). Critical discourse analysis can be used to come to grips with this state of affairs, since power is fought over in and through discourse and in the interdiscursive articulation of different discourses.

It would seem that critical theory must go far beyond the boundaries in which it has been perceived up to now to be in a position to address the educational issue and all that this entails in South Africa. This research contributes towards extending those boundaries.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has laid the foundation for the analysis and discussion which follows in chapter four by discussing the chosen methods of analysis – discourse analysis and interviewing – and describing the data gathering methods used in the study. It therefore prepares the way for the next chapter which will focus on the analysis itself.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Discussion

All dissection requires curiosity and a sturdiness of nerve; even if wholeness is sacrificed in the process (de Kretser 2003)

4.1 Introduction

As already noted in chapter three of this thesis, discourses constructing learners' needs in the SC examination are constituted and sustained by the people who are their agents. They are also the subjects of the discourse (cf. chap 3: 3.3) who collude – albeit unintentionally - to perpetuate dominant inequalities. Because they operate within a society, their assumptions are culturally produced and accepted as true. However, subjects can also be agents to effect change. The purpose of conducting CDA is to identify discourses so that people can choose not to be implicated in them and thus effect change.

In critically analyzing the SC examination papers, the aim of this study was to explore the way the language needs of second language learners at tertiary level are constructed. The analysis thus identifies the discourses constructing their needs manifest in the questions on the examination papers. In addition, examiners were interviewed regarding their perceptions of what literature in general, and the different types of questions in particular, contribute to the needs of learners. In summary, the analysis identifies the sets of ideas (the discourses) that are constructing L2 learners' language needs in both the language and comprehension paper (Paper 1) and the literature paper (Paper 2) in the 2001 and 2002 Senior Certificate examinations. Since the format of the examinations has been standardized, it is my contention that the discourses which have been identified extend beyond this particular data set. It is also my contention that the discourses will extend beyond the SC examination and will inform the construction of learners' needs in the new NSC examination set to replace the SC in 2008 such is their robust nature. The analysis which forms the focus of this chapter is substantiated by drawing extensively on the data.

Although the discourses that construct learners' needs and the ideologies that underpin them are identified separately for purposes of this analysis, they overlap, are inextricably linked and influence one another. The overlap of discourses manifests itself in both the language and comprehension and literature papers in confusing ways. Identifying the discourses is thus necessary in trying to effect clarity and understanding, but is nonetheless somewhat arbitrary. Furthermore, identifying them is not a process that is easily available to consciousness: as an educator, my

ways of thinking about teaching, learning and assessment have been determined by the very discourses that I sought to identify. A willingness to accept correction (to 'unlearn') and motivation to become informed from the perspective of criticality as well as by other theoretical analyses of language were therefore imperative to questioning which ideologies inherent in the discourses had become naturalized to the extent that I could initially not 'see' how they were not 'commonsense' approaches to language learning.

4.2 Format of the SC Examination Papers

The national language and comprehension paper (Paper 1) for speakers of English as an additional language consists of three sections; a reading comprehension based on a text for 35 marks, a summary for 10 marks and a language section (grammar and spelling) for 35 marks, making a total of 80 marks. Candidates have two hours to complete the paper.

The English as an additional language literature paper consists of four sections with a total of 40 marks each. Each section represents a particular genre – drama, poetry, short story, novel. All candidates (both HG and SG) must answer two of the four sections and have two hours in which to do so. The total mark is 80. Which sections candidates choose to answer will depend on the choice of genres of the particular school they attended. This leads to differences across schools and across provinces. For example, based on available statistics, Examiner A (p.2) stated that 75-80% of institutions in Province A chose poetry. The second most popular choice was the short story (Examiner A, p.1). On the other hand, Examiner D (p.12) stated that the short story and novel were the most popular choices in Province D.

Within each section / genre candidates are sometimes given a further choice, but not always. An analysis of the literature papers that formed part of this study revealed that two provinces gave candidates a choice of questions and two did not. This was the case in both the HG and SG papers. It becomes immediately apparent that in this regard 'standardization' is not consistent across provinces. By way of comparison, in the Independent Examination Board (IEB) HG and SG literature papers candidates were given no choice.

Examiners asked questions that required one word, fill in (cloze), multiple choice or sentence-type answers. Questions were generally for 2 marks and occasionally for 3 or 4 marks. For a 4 mark answer the candidate would have to write a little more extensively. It was most unusual to encounter a question for up to 6 marks except in

the IEB examination papers where short essays of up to 20 marks are set (cf. IEB HG Paper 2 – 2002). Examiner A (p.2) explained:

We try to stick to a set formula for the second language in particular, whereby, you know, as a rule you wouldn't ask huge chunk questions of say four or five marks where it requires a paragraph type answer from the learner. We'd stick to two to three mark kinds of questions.

However, Examiner C (p.5) said that s/he set questions for 5 or 8 marks in the literature paper (Paper 2) as learners were not required to write extensively in the language and comprehension paper (Paper 1) and this examiner thought that they should. Analysis of Paper 1 confirmed that the amount of writing required could not be described as "extensive". However, extensive writing is being assessed in the portfolio, the continuous assessment (CASS) section of the curriculum that replaced Paper 3, which was discontinued in 2002. The portfolio consists, firstly, of the tests and examinations that learners write throughout the year. This section contributes 30 marks. Creative writing assignments, consisting of two essays and two shorter pieces (for example, formal and informal letters, invitations, directions, dialogues all constituting popular genres and literacy practices embedded within particular social groups) contribute another 50 marks (15 for each essay and 10 for each shorter piece) giving a total of 80. The oral examination consists of prepared and unprepared reading, prepared and unprepared speaking and a listening comprehension and totals 60:

So the 60 of the oral and the 80 of the portfolio – that's 140 – and then you get the two papers [Papers 1 and 2] that are 80 and 80 that makes a total of 300 (Examiner B, pp.19-20).

In the two written papers, I identified three meaning-related discourses, two literature-related discourses and three process-related discourses, which I term 'Compromise' discourses (cf. Table 4.1 below). My identification was then corroborated by interview data. Each of the discourses will be discussed and exemplified in detail.

Meaning-related discourses	Literature-related discourses	Process-related discourses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The 'Received Tradition' of English Teaching ▪ Language as an Instrument of Communication ▪ The Autonomous Text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Literature Study Develops Language Proficiency ▪ Literature Study is a Medium for understanding Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compromise discourses

Table 4.1 Discourses identified by the research

4.3 The Discourses Constructing Learners' Needs

4.3.1 Meaning-related Discourses

4.3.1.1 The 'Received Tradition' of English Teaching

The majority of questions in the language (grammar) section of the language and comprehension examination paper (Paper 1) reflect what Christie (1993) terms the "Received Tradition" of English teaching. 'Received Tradition' discourse is also manifest in questions on the literature paper (Paper 2).

In using the term 'Received Tradition', Christie refers to the practice that arose in nineteenth century Britain of teaching the rules of English grammar and paraphrasing the words of others:

... a number of time-consuming exercises came to absorb the energies of teachers and students alike: exercises in parsing⁷ and analysis, in correcting 'faulty sentences', in rehearsing the creation of simple sentences, in copying improving tales, in writing paraphrases of the writing of others – particularly in excerpts from literature (Christie 1993: 77).

To explain the history behind these practices, one must bear in mind that humankind evolved from "utterance to text" (Olson 1977); from speaking to writing. The idea that written texts evolved from spoken texts does not mean that pre-literate people were primitive; they possessed a complex, extensive, albeit predominantly oral 'literature' – as has been established by modern anthropology. In this literature, oral statements

⁷ Parsing is "identify[ing] the grammatical form and function of (a word or words in a sentence)" (*Oxford Paperback Dictionary* 1988).

were preserved and their memorization facilitated through the use of mnemonic devices such as “formalized patterns of speech, recital under ritual conditions, the use of drums and other musical instruments and the employment of professional remembrances” (Goody & Watt 1968: 31). However, poetization of statements in this way meant that the meanings embedded within them were not necessarily explicit. Poetized language thus often required interpretation by wise men. Modern-day oral statements such as idioms, proverbs, parables, adages, aphorisms, riddles and verses that preserve important cultural information are also not explicit, require recourse to prior knowledge and social context and may also need to be interpreted with the support of others. Poetized language is also common in religious texts such as the Bible which also need to be interpreted by ‘insiders’ or experts drawing on a common theological background.

Olson (1977) explains that ideas embedded in oral language were first captured in the form of pictures and pictograms. Later, phonetization – an attempt to make writing reflect the sound structure of speech – developed and ultimately led to the invention of the Greek phonemic alphabet. Prior to this in Greece, the teaching of rhetoric was understood as teaching the way meanings could be constructed and, more importantly, involved studying the ways language is used to inform, explain, argue and persuade (Christie 1993) orally. The focus was therefore on ways in which language could be used to achieve specific effects or meanings. The Greek phonemic alphabet facilitated the writing down of language because there was a distinctive sign for each of the represented sounds. Writing down language in its ‘complete’ form allowed some of the ambiguities of meaning contained in oral language to be removed and decreased reliance upon prior knowledge or context. Rather than acknowledging that meaning is constructed through the interaction of an oral text with its context, attempts increasingly came to be made to ‘capture’ meanings explicitly in the text. This process of capturing explicit meanings initially revolved around attempts to record and preserve information that had already been committed to memory, but later became an instrument for formulating original statements. As a result of these processes, a set of ideas arose focusing on the idea that texts are, and should be, autonomous of the contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. In my thesis this is referred to as the discourse of the ‘Autonomous Text’ (cf. 4.3.1.3 below).

Once language had been captured through the use of phonemic writing systems, it became available for formal study. This formal study then led to the development of

abstract categories or rules for using language consistently (Olson 1977: 267). Over time these rules for using language came to be understood as logical procedures which could serve as rules for thinking. A dichotomy thus came to be constructed between language or “form”, and “content” or meaning (Christie 1993: 88). This is a critical point, especially if mastery of the rules of grammar and spelling is conflated with the ability to construct meaning. In this conflation language is seen as “instrumentary” (Christie 1993: 88) and as a neutral phenomenon; as serving ideas, not as enabling their construction (Cope & Kalantzis 1993). This model of language allows no significant engagement with language as meaning; does not illuminate the study of meaning; and “can *never* enable the student to address the character or organization of the text” (Christie 1993: 89) [my emphasis]. Furthermore, this model helped produce generations of people unable to see that the grammar of speech is different from, but not inferior to that of writing (*ibid.*). This perception concerning the inferiority of speech is evidenced in complaints about news reading and in the way in which one’s manner of speaking signals membership of a certain class and thus often facilitates acceptance (or not) into various spheres of social life.

The widespread development of print literacy following the invention of the printing press further entrenched the perception that texts are autonomous representations of meaning (Olson 1977) which had developed as a result of the introduction of alphabetic writing systems. Writers were now required to write as if the sentence was an adequate, explicit representation of the meaning, since these sentences had to be understood in contexts other than those in which they were written. A sentence was written to have only one meaning, which dictated its lexical and syntactic features. Statements were formulated and their implications derived. The truth of these implications was tested and the original statement was either revised or generalized from. Premises no longer rested on common experience or commonsense intuition, but on empirical data. (The link with the development of the empirical sciences which was occurring at the same time as these processes is easily discernable here). The specialized form of language which attempted to make meanings unambiguous and to ‘capture’ meaning in the text was adopted by the Royal Society of London and propagated through the work of “essayists” such as Locke and Hume.

In their older sense, rhetorical studies were always concerned with texts – passages of language constructed to make meaning and hence serve important purposes (Christie 1993: 89). Texts were dealt with in context: orators would teach others how to make meanings for particular audiences. After language came to be written down,

rhetorical studies continued to flourish in England in the sixteenth century and to have importance into the eighteenth century. However, the focus of language study shifted from language primarily in the oral mode to language in the written mode. By the eighteenth century, print material was available to significant numbers of people. Setting down language on the page raises consciousness about syntax and how it works, a phenomenon evidenced in the grammars which were produced once print literacy became established. Attempts to analyse language at this time were reliant on older analyses of other languages, most notably Latin and Greek, with the result that the grammars used the structure of these languages to inform their analyses of languages such as English. The 'Received Tradition' of English (in this thesis referred to as 'Received Tradition' discourse) that developed in the nineteenth century as a result of this consciousness therefore focused on language as words, parts of speech, parts of sentences (Christie 1993), on "Latinate" analyses and on meaning making as dependent on a mastery of the rules of language or "grammar".

A contrasting view to the idea that meaning is constructed through the correct application of grammatical rules and is thus 'contained' in text (i.e. that texts are 'autonomous') is that the text gives the reader a *basis* for constructing meaning (Olson 1977) [my emphasis]. This is congruent with Gee's (1996) contention that meaning is constructed through interaction with clues (words) on the page. However, meaning is always partly a matter of intended inclusions and exclusions within an assumed semantic field (Gee 1996). The exclusion principle implies that speakers of the same social language can mean different things by the words they use. According to Gee (1996), users can guess (the "guessing principle") what other meanings are excluded and/or included depending on the assumptions made about the relevant context (the "context principle") (cf. chap 3: 3.3). Gee (1998: 74) points out that people who belong to the same or a similar social group will make better guesses. Gee's perspective contrasts strongly with the autonomous text perspective, namely, that the text contains one explicit meaning which can be decoded through knowing grammar and vocabulary.

Discourse is implicated in meaning making. Discourse is related to context because our ways of speaking and writing are socially determined (Fairclough 1985). Individuals will make different assumptions about context, and therefore about the meaning of the text, based on the discourses in which they are implicated. The way the individual constructs meaning in a particular situation (for example, in the assessment situation) will depend on access to particular discourse(s). If examiners

are not aware, or do not bear in mind that the meaning of the language they use is socially determined – or in other words, constructed through discourse (and Fairclough (1985) observes that people are ‘standardly’ unaware) – and not explicit in the text, then they may fail to realize that the meaning they ascribe to the text may have different meanings to candidates.

The idea that the text provides only a basis for the construction of meaning is also taken up in so-called ‘interactive’ reading theories (cf. for example, Carrell, Devine & Eskey 1989), which construct reading as an interactive process involving the use of ‘bottom-up’ or text-based data and ‘top-down’ information (stored as cognitive schemata) which readers bring to the text. This idea will be taken up in more detail later.

Although the ‘Received Tradition’ discourse has its origins in the development of print literacy, the political context of nineteenth century Britain also led to its dominance. According to Christie (1993), nineteenth century urbanization led to cities and towns being perceived as centres of political unrest that threatened the established social order. The solution lay in ‘educating’ the working classes, or, it can be argued, disciplining them through schooling (cf. 2.2.1 for a discussion on the normalizing effects of institutions and the internally disciplined subject). A preoccupation with exercises which focused on the rules of grammar and spelling served education’s purpose. Rhetoric had no place in a system that was “intended to produce generations of sober, law-abiding and industrious workers” (Christie 1993: 87), rather than independent persons, capable of developing and sustaining arguments and opinions of their own.

The idea that schooling serves to discipline is taken up in later social analyses. Bowles and Gintis (1976: 157), for example, view the school system that developed in the USA as geared towards “domesticating a labour force”. This orthodox Marxist perspective, discussed in chapter two (cf. 2.2.1), came to be replaced by the Foucauldian perspective that the individual is determined by the dominant ideologies underpinning discourses since, in this perspective, language in its many and varied forms and not the economy is the central element in ideology as power. The disciplinary nature of education in the USA is pointed out by Braverman (1974: 439) who describes schools there as “immense teen-sitting organizations” where the youth are sent to keep them from ‘making trouble’ in a capitalist created society. Bowles and Gintis (1976: 200) explain that in America “...the expansion and continuing transformation of the system of capitalist production... led to shifts in the

occupational distribution of the labour force and constant changes in the skills requirement for jobs”, which led to growing pressure for public education. There is a parallel to be drawn between the situation in America at this time and the vocational demands being made on education in present-day South Africa (cf. chap 1: 1.2).

Examples of the ‘Received Tradition’ discourse abound in the examination papers and in the transcripts of interviews with examiners. A significant aspect of these examples relates to grammar and spelling and is picked up most obviously in the interview data. Examiner F (p.10), for example, states that grammar and spelling must be correct in the language section of the language and comprehension paper. Similarly, Examiner B (p.6) notes:

...it's about the grammar rules, the grammar structures ... using English correctly. It's the only aspect, or the only part... of the paper where spelling is very important ... in the end I think one should strive for teaching pupils to use English correctly. That's what I think education is all about. And that's what I think the language section aims at: to test those structures: Can those structures be applied and can they be used correctly?

Examiner D notes that Paper 1 tries to cover as many facets of language as possible:

We try to cover concord, we try to cover correct use of... prepositions... (p.9) ... sentence transformation through active and passive, direct and indirect voice ...changing from a statement to a question... a positive to a negative (p.10).

This is augmented by Examiner B who adds “reported speech and conjunctions” (p.4) to the list of language elements which must be tested in the paper.

The following examples of the construction of learners’ language related needs as dependent on knowledge of the rules of grammar are taken from various papers in the sample.

Example 1: reported / indirect speech (cf. SG Paper 1 - 2001)

The question is followed by the picture it relates to.

Report what the alien in the picture above told his friend.

Start with: The alien said that...

(3)



Example 2: changing a statement into a question (cf. SG Paper 1 - 2001)

*Write only the tag to turn the following statement into a question, for example,
She walks to town, doesn't she?*

The astronauts must be given food and drink, ? (2)

Example 3: changing a positive to a negative (cf. SG Paper 1 – 2001)

Rewrite the following as if this statement is NOT true (negative form).

Space begins 150 kilometres above our heads. (2)

The above questions requiring candidates to engage with sentence transformations were observed by Examiner D (p.10) to be the “worst answered of all of them”. Candidates therefore lose marks and may well fail the examination because they cannot perform the sort of syntactical transformation which will allow them to make ‘accurate’ meanings. As the discussion above has suggested however, meaning construction (whether in writing/speaking or in reading/listening) is dependent on context as much as on text since the features of a text are merely clues to meaning making. In making real meanings, candidates would be required to draw on much more than a mere knowledge of grammar and syntax.

I could not find examples in the examination papers of all the facets of language use mentioned by the examiners (cf. discussion above). However, many of those that were mentioned were tested in a cloze passage (included below). Examiner B (p.6)

elaborated on the use of cloze passages, explaining that grammar structures were tested in a context

...so it's not a loose standing sentence that stands there on its own. It makes no sense whatsoever... We give them a short passage and the language questions are based on that particular passage and it's contextualized in that way.

Analysis of Paper 1 confirmed that this was the case. Examiner B makes the point (above) that a sentence on its own without context – a loose standing sentence – “makes no sense whatsoever”. Interestingly, this remark contradicts the idea that texts are independent of context (cf. 4.3.1.3). By placing the language questions in a cloze passage within a context, this examiner is attempting to remediate the inadequacies of the autonomous text perspective.

Notwithstanding, Examiner D (p.10) stated that examiners were criticized for using cloze technique to assess communicative ability since it was felt that there were “better ways” of doing so. Tellingly, this examiner observed that at least the cloze passage gave the candidate a chance to guess the correct answer (p.10) (cf. the above discussion on Gee's (1996) “guessing principle”).

As the following example of a cloze passage from Paper 1 shows, however, the use of the guessing principle might not be available to all candidates because of differences in the social contexts on which they draw.

Example 4: cloze passage (cf. SG Paper 1 – 2001)

Your friend recently read a book containing interesting information about space and space travel. Complete the conversation between the two of you by filling in ONE missing word in the space provided or by giving the correct form of the word in brackets.

You need not write the whole dialogue. Write down only the number of the question and the word you fill in.

George: You wouldn't 3.8.1 me if told you of all the interesting things I have found out about space. 3.8.2 you know that animals have been in space?

You: You're not serious, 3.8.3 you?

George: I am. Spiders called Anita and Arabella became celebrities when they 3.8.4 (take) up to the Skylab space station in 1973. They were taking part 3.8.5 an experiment. School children in America suggested that they be delivered to the station to see if spiders can build proper webs when they are weightless. Although they were not 3.8.6 (success) in the beginning, they did manage to build a web on their second orbit around the earth. Unfortunately, the 3.8.7 (science) couldn't stop them from 3.8.8 (die) before they returned to earth.

You: That's a terrible story. Do you have any more horrors up your 3.8.9 (street/arm/sleeve/chimney)?

George: I have 3.8.10 interesting story about birds. The launch of a Space Shuttle was 3.8.11 (hold) up in 1995 because birds pecked holes in its 3.8.12 (fule/fool/fuel/feul) tank. The birds were woodpeckers that 3.8.13 (normal) drill into trees to get insects or to make a nest. Luckily, technicians discovered the holes before the launch and the astronaut's life was 3.8.14 (safe). If it hadn't 3.8.15 for the technicians, the Shuttle would have 3.8.16 (blow) up.

You: Wow! And I always thought that space was only about 3.8.17 (hero) and rockets. If I 3.8.18 an astronaut, I would be 3.8.19 (real) glad to have such reliable people on my team. Maybe you should lend me your book so that I can educate 3.8.20 (me). (20)

The content of the cloze passage above illustrates the difficulties of standardizing the examination paper (cf. chap 1: 1.2.1.1) in a socially and culturally diverse country such as South Africa. In analyzing the passage above, the question that arises is whether candidates from rural schools would relate to attributing human characteristics to animals or insects, or to the concept of a Skylab. It appears that in trying to avoid the problems inherent in assessing grammar outside a context (cf. Examiner B's comment above) examiners are coming up against other problems.

Although the examiners did not mention parsing as a facet of language that was assessed, analysis of the above cloze passage illustrates that the majority of questions assess candidates' ability to parse or identify the grammatical form and function of words as the following table shows:

Question number	Question function
3.8.1	Supply lexical item in correct grammatical form: <i>believe</i>
3.8.2	Supply lexical item in correct grammatical form: <i>Do</i>
3.8.3	Supply lexical item in correct grammatical form: <i>are</i>
3.8.4	Grammatical form required : (safe) - <i>saved</i>
3.8.5	Supply missing preposition: <i>in</i>
3.8.6	Grammatical form required: (success) – <i>successful</i>
3.8.7	Grammatical form required: (science) - <i>scientists</i>
3.8.8	Grammatical form required: (die) – <i>dying</i>
3.8.9	Complete idiom: up your <i>sleeve</i>
3.8.10	Supply lexical item in correct grammatical form: <i>an</i>
3.8.11	Grammatical form required: (hold) – <i>held</i>
3.8.12	Recognise correct spelling: <i>fuel</i>
3.8.13	Grammatical form required: (normal) - <i>normally</i>
3.8.14	Grammatical form required: (safe) – <i>saved</i>
3.8.15	Supply lexical item in correct grammatical form: <i>been</i>
3.8.16	Grammatical form required: (blow) – <i>blown</i>
3.8.17	Grammatical form required: (hero) – <i>heroes</i>
3.8.18	Grammatical form required: <i>were</i>
3.8.19	Grammatical form required: (real) – <i>really</i>
3.8.20	Grammatical form required: (me) – <i>myself</i>

Table 4.2 Analysis of the cloze passage (SG Paper 1 – 2001)

As the table shows, 10 of the 20 questions in the cloze passage require candidates to supply the correct form of a word which has been provided. This involves them analyzing the sentence to identify the form of the word which is needed – or in other words to parse. Of the remaining 10 questions in the passage, 9 require some form of grammatical analysis (with question 3.8.18 testing candidates' ability to express hypotheticality by using a subjunctive). Yet, according to Examiner B (p.19), the perceived language need behind cloze questions is recognition of words:

...the whole reasoning behind giving them the words [candidates are given several words to choose from] is so that the candidate will recognize the correct word to put in rather than think of it of his own... so in one way it's accommodating the standard grade and the second language candidate so that they can also demonstrate that they do understand the word and can place it in a context rather than thinking of their own words...

I argue that the discourse construing learners as needing to be grammatically correct – articulated by the examiners themselves (see above) – and able to parse is the discourse of the “Received Tradition” (Christie 1993) of English language teaching, which will not facilitate communication of meaning (Bougey 2002) because it ignores its constructed nature. Although there is not doubt that learners do need to have control of the mechanics of the language to be able to communicate, meaning is not dependent on absolute accuracy in their use. The focus on the mechanics in the ‘Received Tradition’ ignores context in meaning making and also does not take account of developments in language teaching approaches over the past 30 years. Communicative language teaching, for example, aims to take account of the “rules of use without which the rules of usage would be useless” (Hymes 1971). The focus in the papers seems, however, to be very much on the rules of usage.

As the table also indicates, questions 3.8.1, 3.8.2 and 3.8.3 (above) require candidates to identify and supply a missing lexical item (in its correct grammatical form) on the basis of information contained in the text. This is an indication of the idea that meaning is contained in the text and is not constructed through the interaction of text and context. Again an overlap in discourses occurs (reflected in the above cloze passage): ‘Received Tradition’ discourse overlaps with that of ‘Autonomous Text’ discourse (cf. 4.3.1.3). To provide the correct answers to 3.8.1, 3.8.2 and 3.8.3, candidates will not only have to be able to parse, they will also have to refer to other texts (Popkewitz 1995; Fairclough 1992) and their prior knowledge of the conventions of language use.

As mentioned above, candidates were also required to identify parts of speech in the literature paper, for example:

Example 1 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Sunstrike)

Quote a word from stanza 1 that tells us that the prospector is exhausted.

(1)

The question above requires candidates to identify an adjective.

Example 2 (cf. Western Cape SG Paper 2 – 2001; text Anthem for Doomed Youth)

Give TWO words in lines 4 and 5 which are synonyms. (2)

Having identified this practice led me to conclude that the literature paper is also used to assess language (grammar). Examiner C (p.4) corroborated my conclusion: "... you have to have a mixture of grammar... and content [in the paper]".

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, in addition to focusing on the rules of grammar and spelling, Christie (1993: 77) identifies "[W]riting paraphrases of the writing of others – particularly in excerpts from literature" as also being part of the discourse of the 'Received Tradition'. For example, in the 2001 ESL HG literature paper, 2 out of 16 questions for Question 1, and 3 out of 18 questions for Question 2 (both on Macbeth) were paraphrasing / 'explain the meaning of words' questions. In the 2002 ESL HG literature paper, 4 out of 18 questions for Question 1, and 5 out of 16 questions for Question 2 (both on Macbeth) were paraphrasing / 'explain the meaning' type questions. The above statistics indicate that the percentage of paraphrasing questions in the literature papers increased from 2001 to 2002, suggesting that examiners believe that this form of assessment can be used to indicate language proficiency and / or understanding of the literature. Examples of paraphrasing questions manifested in the literature paper follow:

Example 1 (cf. Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Preludes)

Explain the simile in lines 53-54 in relation to the main theme of the poem.
(6)

Example 2 (cf. Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Prayer Before Birth)

The unborn child asks the Creator to do seven things. Mention TWO of these in your own words. (2)

Example 3 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Macbeth)

In your own words explain what Lady Macbeth means when she says,

"What thou wouldst highly,

that thou wouldst holily: would not play false,

And yet wouldst win. (2)

Example 4 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text To Kill a Mockingbird)

'But before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience (lines 20-22). In your own words simplify and explain what Atticus means. (4)

Example 5 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Animal Farm)

The fourth, fifth and sixth commandments are changed when words are added. Rewrite these commandments as they appear later in the novel. (3)

Example 6 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Macbeth)

Briefly explain the content of the letter that Macbeth writes to Lady Macbeth. (4)

Example 7 (cf. Western Cape SG Paper 2 – 2001; text Anthem for Doomed Youth)

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall; (line 12)

Rewrite line 12 in your own words. (2)

In addition to assessing candidates' ability to paraphrase, recall is also being assessed: candidates will have to rely on recall to a greater or lesser degree to answer the above questions. This is particularly apparent in Example 4 where the extract on which this question was based did not contain the 'commandments' as they appear later in the novel; therefore candidates would have to remember them.

The 'Received Tradition' discourse also manifested itself in the reading comprehension section of the language and comprehension paper in the form of paraphrasing questions. Candidates are instructed to use their 'own words', which implies paraphrasing. Examples follow.

Example 1 (cf. HG Paper 1 – 2001)

State the problem that one of the writer's friends apparently has. Use your OWN words (2)

Example 2 (cf. HG Paper 1 – 2001)

Explain in your OWN words what 'drop-dead gorgeous' means. (2)

Example 3 (cf. HG Paper 1 – 2001)

What is the root cause of the 21-year-old's dejection (paragraph 4)? Use your own words. (2)

Example 4 (cf. HG Paper 1 – 2001)

Why would anyone undergo lipo-suction? Use your own words. (2)

To be able to paraphrase the candidate must comprehend the text, which necessitates relying on other discourses and texts to arrive at an interpretation (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Referring to learners' ability to paraphrase, Examiner A (p.25) commented that although learners appear to 'understand' when one engages them in discussion, their "ability to transform their instinctive understanding into words, to verbalise it [in writing] is lacking...".

An understanding that speaking and writing are not equivalent elucidates the problem referred to above. When speaking, speakers and listeners prompt each other by providing and questioning links between propositions (Bouhey 1997), thereby helping each other to construct meaning. Educators may thus come to the conclusion that the learner understands, when in fact this is not so. In writing, however, writers must alone explore, oppose and make connections between propositions with the result that any learning which has not occurred is very visible.

Another related explanation for the difficulty candidates experience when writing, is that linked to Olson's (1977) observations regarding the development of written language. As already noted, once language came to be written down, the belief arose that the meaning of a text should be explicit – "clear and true" – and should "re[ly] on no private referential or contextual knowledge" (Olson 1977: 269 & 259, respectively). Children are inducted into the use of this language during their school years and learn to "speak a written language" (Greenfield 1972 cited in Olson 1977: 271). To be able to do this successfully is to be part of a discourse since it "requires agreed-upon linguistic conventions, a shared knowledge of the world, and a preferred way of interpreting events" (Olson 1977: 272).

Many ESL learners in SA have not been successfully inducted into this discourse. They have thus not made the progression from “utterance to text” and this is a crucial point, since “utterance and text relate in different ways to background knowledge and to the criteria for successful performance” (Olson 1977: 277). Utterance assumes that meaning is in the shared intentions of speaker and hearer, whereas the opposite holds that the text is autonomous: the meaning is in the sentence (text) and has to be retrieved. An ability to retrieve the meaning from the text without recourse to additional background information came to be viewed as the ideal for literacy and a cultural norm (Olson 1977: 297). “...logical development in a literate culture involves learning to apply logical operations to the sentence meaning rather than to the assimilated or interpreted or assumed speaker’s intentions” (Olson 1977: 274). Small wonder then that Examiner D stated:

...a question which requires a child to write something in his own words, that is the weakest question of them all (p.6).

An overlap in discourses thus manifests in the paraphrasing questions. Not only is the ‘Received Tradition’ discourse constructing the needs of ESL learners: another meaning-related discourse, the ‘Autonomous Text’ discourse, which assumes that meaning is explicit in a text (cf. 4.3.1.3) and a literature-related discourse, ‘Literature Study Develops Language Proficiency’ (cf. 4.3.2.1) are doing so as well.

According to Christie (1993), another element in the ‘Received Tradition’ of English teaching had begun to emerge by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Because of the changing nature of English-speaking societies such as England and Australia, a romantic view of the role of literature became influential, one that focused on the claimed moral benefits of reading great works of literature (Christie 1993: 78-79). In 1921, the first enquiry was called into the teaching of English in England. This became known as *The Newbolt Report*. Its commissioners “regretted the preoccupation with teaching the rules of English grammar in the elementary schools at the expense of more imaginative activities” (Christie 1993: 95). While this might have been a significant breakthrough in terms of some of the critique of the ‘Received Tradition’ as a disciplinary force earlier in this chapter, this was not to be since *The Newbolt Report* was influential in lending support to the growing significance attached to English literature teaching. The view that literature was a civilizing force in a culture became very influential in theories of English teaching. Claims were made that literature served to safeguard and preserve much that was best in the culture; that it developed sensibility and promoted moral development

(Christie 1993: 93, 95) and was a vehicle of culture, religion and “enlightenment” (Kachru 1986). These claims link with those of Viswanathan (1989 cited in Pennycook 2003) that the colonial government in India relied on literature to instill “some sort of moral education... to ensure the dissemination of value, tradition and authority”. However, this begs the question of whose values, tradition and authority were to be instilled. Viswanathan (*ibid.*) observes that English literature appeared in the curriculum of the colonies long before it appeared in England and that in India “a canon of English literature was in part a direct response to the problem faced by the colonial government that the native people needed to be uplifted from the ‘common drudgery’ by which they earned their subsistence” (*ibid.*). This emphasizes the irony contained in Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) argument that ‘liberating’ dominated cultures often meant ‘giving’ them the means of appropriating ‘legitimate’ culture. Rather than being a source of the more “imaginative activities” cited as a lack in *The Newbolt Report*, from a critical perspective, the introduction of the teaching of English literature can be perceived as hegemonic and just as disciplinary in intent as the teaching of grammar and the correction of faulty sentences.

Aspects of the moral claims for English literature discourse were articulated by examiners and manifested in the examination paper questions. Examiner B (p.16) stated that s/he liked to teach the pupils something about life after school:

...values and morals... some value... that they can take with them.

This examiner also stated that literature teaches pupils to

...assess the way a character behaves... Did the character behave in a fair way? Was it right, was it wrong... (pp.6-7).

The question below exemplifies this aim:

Example 1 (cf. Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Maru)

What do we learn about the principal's character from his reaction to Margaret's answer (line 24) and from his behaviour towards her after this? Mention TWO qualities with reasons.⁸ (4)

However, concepts of right and wrong are based on assumptions that are culturally produced and accepted (Fairclough 1985). ESL candidates are unlikely to be influenced by the way in which fictional characters behave to the extent that they will adopt the values and beliefs exemplified by these characters, particularly if the moral values so exemplified are foreign to, or different from those upheld in their own cultures.

Other examples of questions based on this discourse follow.

Example 2 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text An abandoned bundle)

The poet seems to suggest that the baby's mother is completely innocent in this tragedy. Why is this hard for the reader to accept? (2)

The above question implies a prescribed interpretation of the meaning of the poem, namely, that the candidate will not accept the baby's mother's innocence. Examples 3 and 4 below, which refer to the same poem, are similarly prescriptive – judging from the answers provided on the memorandum (see fn 4 & 5).

Example 3 (cf. IEB HG Paper 2 – 2002)

A baby is supposed to be loved, cuddled and cared for. Instead, in this poem, we are confronted with horror.

Has Mtshali succeeded in bringing this real-life horror home to you? Your answer must make specific reference to the poem.⁹ (3)

Example 4 (cf. IEB HG Paper 2 – 2002)

⁸ Memorandum answer: He is prejudiced / hypocritical / self-centred / malicious – he judges her because she says she is a Masarwa. He is afraid of what people will say. He treats her harshly, tries to force her to leave. He is weak and mean. A liar (Two qualities with reasons).

⁹ Answer: Yes. "red bandanas of blood" "fought fiercely" over baby. "mutilated corpse" on "rubbish heap". Candidates must make own but specific references to poem to highlight horror.

You have been appointed as the defence lawyer handling the case of the mother who has abandoned her baby.

Attempt to prove that she should not be found guilty. Suggest reasons for her actions and explain who/what else could be blamed for her actions.¹⁰

(5)

Prescriptive answers suggest that prescriptive moral interpretations are being sought, which supports the contention that literature is being taught to instill a particular moral perspective. Example 5 is a further example of such a question.

Example 5 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text To Kill a Mockingbird)

In your own opinion is Mr Tate's sense of justice justified? Explain your answer fully.¹¹

(2)

In teaching Frost's *Mending Wall* (EL SG), Examiner B's (p.16) aim was to convey

...the sense of not building walls around ourselves, separating us from others... an idea of unity... respecting other people's points of view.

Examiner B set the following question on this poem that could be related to this expressed aim:

Example 6 (cf. Gauteng SG Paper 2 – 2002)

Explain in your own words the suggested meaning of the line "Good fences make good neighbours".

(3)

Although the above question relates to values and beliefs, it also requires candidates to demonstrate their paraphrasing skills, and there is thus an overlap with this other aspect of the 'Received Tradition' discourse.

¹⁰ Answer: Not guilty (convincing argument). Reasons (two) e.g. poverty, too young. Who could be blamed (two) e.g. government, parents etc. father of baby.

¹¹ Although this question appears to be asking for the candidate's interpretation of meaning, the answer on the memorandum is prescriptive: "Yes, it is because Boo did not kill Mr Ewell deliberately while Mr Ewell's attempt at the children's lives was premeditated. The memorandum neither allows for a 'No' answer, nor a negotiated interpretation of the text. This perspective overlaps with compromise discourses that are constructing the needs of learners (cf. 4.3.1.1).

Example 7 (cf. Gauteng SG Paper 2 – 2002; text The Unknown Citizen)

Give two reasons why you find the inscription on the pedestal cold and impersonal. (2)

The question posed in example 7 appears to evaluate whether the candidate has formed an opinion (cf. the use of 'you') and is able to express it. However, the answer that is obviously being sought is a particular answer based on the perception that the words are indeed "cold and impersonal". Examiner B requires a specific answer based on a specific reading of the text and this answer is not negotiable. The 'Autonomous Text' discourse (cf. 4.3.1.3) thus overlaps with the aspect of the 'Received Tradition' discourse that prescribes particular cultural values in constructing the needs of learners.

In the data I was able to identify yet another aspect of the 'Received Tradition' discourse in the literature papers which goes beyond Christie's (1993) 'Received Tradition'. Although this aspect is not mentioned at all by Christie, it manifests in the literature papers and is arguably part of the same tradition in that it constructs learners as needing to be able to identify simile, metaphor, irony, personification, alliteration and other language structures which are used specifically when studying and discussing literature. It thus focuses on the teaching of a metalanguage which can be used to analyse literature. My contention is that although one of the aims of teaching literature is to expose learners to 'great' English literature (Christie 1993), candidates are being assessed in the literature papers in a similar way to how they are assessed in the language and comprehension paper: they are required to identify and manipulate various grammatical structures in the language paper and to identify and explain various literary devices in the literature paper. This suggests a preoccupation with the way in which language 'works'.

A focus on students needing to master a metalanguage which will allow them to engage with literature, is manifest in the following examples taken from the literature papers.

Example 1 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Poem for my Mother)

The quotation above is an example of

- A *irony*
- B *a metaphor*

C personification

D a simile (1)

Example 2 (cf. Kwa-Zulu Natal SG Paper 2 – 2001; Reapers in a Mieliefield)

Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound in a number of words e.g. faces furrowed. From the poem write down at least two examples of alliteration used by the poet. (2)

Example 3 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text My parents kept me from children who were rough)

“Who threw words like stones...” (line 2)

(a) What figure of speech is present in these words? (1)

Example 4 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Anthem for Doomed Youth)

“rifles’ rapid rattle” is an example of

A alliteration

B personification

C metaphor

D irony (1)

Example 5 (cf. Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002; Julius Caesar)

‘Set honour in one eye and death in the other’ (line 9).

Name the figure of speech in this line. (1)

Examiners offered the following explanations why learners are required to identify figures of speech:

The language need for second language speakers is always a question of learning sufficient vocabulary and language structures to meet the need as expressed in the purpose of learning the language (Examiner E, p.2).

This rather cryptic comment – cryptic because the purpose is not specified – implies that whatever the purpose may be, sufficient vocabulary and knowledge of language structures will meet that purpose. This perspective is part of a discourse that views language as an ‘Instrument of Communication’, or a vehicle which carries meanings which are constructed independently of it (Christie 1993) rather than as a resource for constructing meaning. Examiner A’s comments below support this contention:

*As soon as you start getting into the figures of speech territory then you are now getting into the enhanced aspects of English. That is where you now **learn to use or manipulate language in a more colourful, expressive, more fully rounded way** [my emphasis] (p.4).*

Asking candidates to identify / quote examples of figures of speech will not determine whether they are able to “manipulate language in a more colourful, expressive, more fully rounded way”, since an ability to identify literary devices does not enable one to use those devices to construct meaning as Examiner A appears to be suggesting. A concern with syntax (and here literary devices are being treated in a similar way to syntax) “can never enable the student to address the character or organization of the text” (Christie 1993: 89). An inability to distinguish between a simile and a metaphor therefore serves as a gate-keeping device, as does an inability to analyse grammar (cf. chap 5).

To reiterate, learning a skill in isolation (for example, to identify a simile, or a certain grammatical rule) will not allow that skill to be duplicated for the purpose of making meaning. From a discourse perspective one must acknowledge practices rather than skills and take as a starting point the cultural and social-practice nature of all learning (Prinsloo 2000). All human activity (practice) is situated in real-world contexts; therefore the skills being acquired are bound up with the activity and its community of expert users (Gee 1996). Learners ‘apprentice’ themselves to a group of people who share a certain set of practices (e.g. learning to assemble circuit boards in a workplace, or to cook in a family), ‘pick up’ these practices through joint action with more advanced peers and advance their abilities to engage and work with others in carrying out such practices (Gee 2004b: 77). A critical aspect is that a lot of what constitutes a practice is *tacit* knowledge, built up by daily practice and stored in the routines and procedures executed by people. Furthermore, learners assimilate a particular social identity through the performance of contextualized social practices (Prinsloo 2000). Because of their socially embedded nature, practices are also dependent on access to the discourses through which they are constituted. Over a

period of time one acquires the practice and simultaneously, the discourse(s) (Gee 1996).

Furthermore, skills are not neutral, but involved in relations of power. English language teaching skills are influenced by interests in the socio-cultural environments in which they exist; they create a market for pedagogical and technological materials and for human resources, for example, 'experts' to teach English and foreign students from different parts of the world – such as China and Japan - (Kachru 1986; Pennycook 1994; Phillipson 1996). Street's (1984, 1995, 1996) ideological model of literacy acknowledges that English language teaching is a social practice that is not politically, socially, culturally or economically neutral (cf. chap 2: 2.2.2).

In the above section (as a whole) I have shown that one meaning-related discourse constructing the needs of ESL learners in the SC examination is that of the 'Received Tradition' of English language teaching. I have identified five aspects of this discourse. Firstly, the discourse is preoccupied with the rules of grammar and correct spelling; secondly, with parsing, and thirdly, with paraphrasing. The fourth aspect of this discourse promotes the moral value of teaching English literature. The fifth aspect I have identified requires candidates to identify (name) simile, metaphor, irony, personification, alliteration and other language structures which are part of the language used to discuss literature. It thus constructs students as needing to acquire a metalanguage related to literature.

These aspects of 'Received Tradition' discourse were reflected in the discourse of the examiners interviewed for this research project and manifested in the examination questions. I have argued that language skills are learned as part of embedded, situated practice and not in isolation, and are dependent on access to the discourses through which they are constituted. Learning a skill in isolation (outside a real-world context) will not allow that skill to be duplicated for the purpose of making meaning. I have also argued that moral values are culturally produced and therefore not transmitted (nor should they be transmitted) from one culture to another through the study of English literature.

A second meaning-related discourse manifest in the examination papers (and which will be dealt with in more detail in a separate section below) is 'Language as an Instrument of Communication'.

4.3.1.2 Language as an Instrument of Communication

The discourse that views language as an instrument of communication sees information, thoughts, ideas, beliefs and attitudes as having been constructed independently of language (Christie 1985). Language is the vehicle used to convey these thoughts and ideas. The assumption is that “if the tool of communication is used ‘correctly’” (Boughey 2002: 299) (that is, if the learner ‘knows’ the grammar, can spell and has sufficient vocabulary) then the intended meaning will be conveyed. Clearly this discourse is related to the ‘Received Tradition’ and ‘Autonomous Text’ discourses in that it perceives meaning in words, in syntax. This discourse is exemplified in the example below.

I had to teach that poem at the marking centre to the markers... because of the quality of the marking that was coming through and so it's only then that you realize that the bulk of the people you're setting for [bearing in mind that the markers are teachers] they themselves do not understand what “Tall walls wall me” means. They interpret it in the literal sense whereas, you know, it's got a figurative meaning attached to it. So if people are not in a position to understand those nuances... it becomes a problem transferring those skills to the learner (Examiner C, p.10).

The discourse influencing Examiner C is that language is an instrument of communication; that there is only one meaning contained in the poem, which must be retrieved and can be passed on to the learner – in this case, the markers. In contrast, the discourse that views language as a resource acknowledges that language is implicated in knowledge construction; that it makes sense of and orders experience (Christie 1985). Furthermore, Examiner C's remarks indicate an overlap with process-related discourses (cf. 4.3.3.1 ‘Compromise’ discourses) which will be discussed later.

As well as exemplifying ‘Received Tradition’ discourse, as already indicated, correct use of grammar and spelling is also being linked to the discourse of ‘Language as an Instrument of Communication’ as opposed to ‘Language as a Resource’ (Christie 1985). For example, Examiner B felt that grammar is needed in order “to communicate sensibly... particularly at university level” (p.4). In other words, it is believed that if the learner can use the tool correctly (in the sense that s/he knows the rules of grammar and spelling) then s/he will be able to construct meaning (‘communicate sensibly’).

The overlap between the 'Language as an Instrument of Communication' discourse and the 'Received Tradition' discourse is such that each is difficult to identify separately. The following examples could be used to typify each of the discourses:

Example 1 (cf. IEB HG Paper 1 – 2001)

Give the verb form of the noun 'abstinence' (line 11). (1)

Example 2 (cf. IEB HG Paper 1 – 2001)

Use 'Neither ... nor' to combine the sentences below into one sentence:

Customary rituals are not regarded as unacceptable in the Z.C.C. faith.

Ancestor worship is not regarded as unacceptable in the Z.C.C. faith. (2)

Questions set to determine whether candidates 'know' the content of the various novels, short stories, plays and poems they have 'learned' also exemplify 'Language as an Instrument of Communication' discourse. Examiner C (p.4) stated that examiners are required ("supposed to") set questions on content. Although content questions rely on recall and are therefore considered "superficial" (Examiner D, p.9) and "easy" (Examiner C, p.4), questions like those posed in Examples 1, 2, and 3 below also rely on candidates using language as a resource to construct the meanings *they* want to make. The degree of superficiality or easiness of questions of this nature is therefore largely irrelevant.

Example 1 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Macbeth)

Macbeth has murdered Duncan, Banquo and Lady Mcduff. Explain why each of them has been murdered. (3)

Example 2 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text To Kill a Mockingbird)

In line 12 reference is made to Tom Robinson's case; what is this case about? (2)

Example 3 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Troubled Waters)

Why is Andries upset with Toby? (2)

Examiner C's (p.2) observation that although candidates may know the content, "...because they've missed the key words in a question, more often than not they will

fail” indicates that this examiner realizes that there is more to constructing meaning than recall. In such cases, candidates are probably conforming to the discourse conventions of the text of the examination itself, since assessment instructions such as ‘discuss’ have particular meanings within the context of assessment and will not necessarily be available to those who have not been inducted into the particular discourse (Williams 2005).

In this section, the ‘Language as an Instrument of Communication’ discourse has been identified as constructing the needs of ESL learners in the SC examination. This discourse has been shown to manifest in questions requiring candidates to identify grammatical structures and figures of speech and in questions on content. I have argued that notwithstanding a reliance on recall to answer content questions in the SC examination, candidates must also refer to other texts, discourses and own experience to construct meaning.

The third meaning-related discourse exemplified in the SC examination papers is that of the ‘Autonomous Text’.

4.3.1.3 The Autonomous Text

As already indicated in passing earlier in this chapter, the ‘Autonomous Text’ discourse maintains that “the sentence is an adequate, explicit representation of the meaning” (Olson 1977: 268), that a text can be independent of its context of production or interpretation and can mean the same thing to all readers in all ages (Geisler 1994). A text is viewed as separate from social, cultural and political phenomena, and the assumption is therefore, that one can assess language and its structures separately from the discourse that gave rise to it.

In the literature paper this perspective translates into candidates being asked to explain the effects of literary devices, which requires them to ‘find the meaning’ of these literary devices – which is assumed to be in the text.

Example 1 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Lake Morning in Autumn)

(a) *The poet compares the body of the stork to a “pillow”. This is an example of*

A *metaphor*

B *irony*

C *personification*

D *simile* (2)

(b) *Explain why this is a suitable comparison.* (2)

The ‘suitability’ of comparing the body of a stork to a pillow is relevant only within a particular discourse community – a discourse community where soft, white pillows and storks are familiar and where it is practice to make abstract associations among concepts that on the surface appear completely different. Unless a learner has access to the discourse, the link between these two concepts may be totally inexplicable.

Example 2 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Animal Farm)

Why does the author use the word ‘solemn’ to personify the noise of the gun?
(2)

And the animals heard, from the direction of the farm buildings, the solemn booming of a gun.

This question relies on ESL candidates knowing what the word ‘solemn’ means, since the meaning cannot be constructed from the text. This example illustrates ‘superbly’ that the text is not autonomous and will not yield up its meaning through analysis of sentence structure. As with the question posed in example 1 (above), the candidate must have recourse to other texts and/or prior knowledge to construct meaning and answer the question.

Example 3 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Mamlambo)

Why is the figure of speech “spilled” in line 11 effective? (2)

As they spoke more and more people spilled onto the platform.

Knowledge is related to other knowledge (prior knowledge) and past experience. Leaving aside for the moment the way in which knowledge is culturally produced, suffice it to say that individuals make different assumptions about context (Gee's "context principle"). The line to which the above question refers does not render up the meaning of 'spilled'. As with the questions in examples 1 and 2 above, to arrive at meaning in this particular context the candidate will have to make links between and within existing frames of reference (Kolb 1984; cf. 2.2.3).

Example 4 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Sunstrike)

What is ironic about the word 'ripples'? (2)

Waterless, he came to where
a river had run, now a band
flowing only in ripples
of white unquenchable sand.

In asking questions on irony, cultural assumptions are being made (cf. 2.2.1), namely, that all cultures use irony, whereas irony is arguably culture-specific. In the same way that non-native speakers of a language fail to pick up pragmatic intention, for example, sarcasm (Halliday 1985), they may fail to perceive and understand irony.

Example 5 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text The Great Gatsby)

"Tom was feeling the hot whips of panic"

a) *This is an example of*

- A *personification*
- B *a metaphor*
- C *a simile*
- D *alliteration* (1)

b) *How is this figure of speech effective in showing Tom's state of mind?* (2)

There is no confusion like the confusion of a simple mind, and as we drove away Tom was feeling the hot whips of panic.

Had the candidate understood the novel and its language had not 'gone over his/her head' as stated by Examiner A (cf. 4.3.3.1), question b) in Example 5 above expects the candidate to retrieve the meaning of "hot whips" [of panic] from the text and then to make an association between abstract concepts (i.e. 'hot whips' [of panic] and the state of Tom's mind) and understand why this association is effective.

Notwithstanding that the lines containing the metaphor were part of a longer extract from the novel and the argument could be that the candidate 'knew' the novel and therefore could 'work out' the answer, I argue that this type of question makes erroneous assumptions about how meaning is constructed. It also makes assumptions about the general knowledge of the L2 candidate, which cannot be made since general knowledge is not a-cultural.

Example 6 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Anthem for Doomed Youth)

Explain the irony in line 7. (2)

The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;

The answer to the above question depends on the candidate making the appropriate associations in relation to the word "choir" (namely, melodious harmony) and also having recourse to other texts, or past experience to enable him/her to imagine the sound of "shells" and then to understand why contrasting these abstract concepts can be described as irony.

Setting questions like those exemplified above implies that language can be assessed separately from the discourse that gave rise to it; that is, that conclusions can be drawn from sentence meanings (or from the lines of a poem) without recourse to prior knowledge or other contextual forms. This explains why it is common practice at school to analyse a poem line by line to extract the meaning of each line and so of the whole. Candidates can then 'learn' the particular analysis ('interpretation') – by rote if necessary – so that they can reproduce it in the examination. Of concern is the way in which this practice suggests how it is perceived learning occurs, or even what learning is. This is the result of a product approach to learning (cf. 2.2.1). The learner is expected to 'learn' (remember) what interpretation of the poem was presented by the educator and if s/he can remember then it is perceived that s/he has learned. But this is not learning. There seems to be a lack of awareness that knowledge is

constructed, related to other knowledge and must be applied to the experience of the learner. It does not obtain in 'facts' that must be mastered, especially not in the case of language, since it is through language processes that knowledge (content) comes into being (Cope & Kalantzis 1993).

It appears that current understandings of language and language teaching mirror earlier understandings (Pennycook 2003). Boughey (2002) argues: "Teachers can envisage no other way of approaching teaching than by repeating the experiences of their childhoods". Wilmot (2003) supports this view, observing that so much of what educators think, is entrenched, that is, taken for granted and not questioned.

Furthermore, the rationale upon which teaching is based is diverse. When asked to what extent there is any theoretical coherence across examiners, Examiner F (p.9) stated that "theoretical underpinnings" are very diverse and depend on the "training ... received" as well as "further training" and "own reading".

Another area where 'Autonomous Text' discourse constructs the needs of learners is manifest in questions on the use of typographical conventions in meaning making. Examiner B (p.15) stated that examiners are required (by Umalusi) to set this sort of question. Consider, for example:

Example 1 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001)

Explain the reason for the dash between the words "soil" and "the sacred" in line 12. (2)

The above question was based on the extract below from *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.

'What is that gun firing for?' said Boxer.

'To celebrate our victory!' cried Squealer.

'What victory?' said Boxer. His knees were bleeding, he had lost a shoe and split his hoof, and a dozen pellets had lodged themselves in his hind leg.

'What victory, comrade? Have we not driven the enemy off our soil – the sacred soil of Animal Farm?'

Within the discourse used to discuss and interpret poetry, individual lines of poetry are analysed to uncover the poet's intended meaning. It is also believed that the

poet's meaning can be found by analyzing the typographical conventions used in the poem, for example, the use of dashes (see Example 1 above) and spaces (see Example 2 below). This assumption is based on 'Autonomous Text' discourse, which assumes that conclusions can be drawn from sentence meanings (or structure in this case) without recourse to prior knowledge or other contextual forms. However, interpretations are subjective: core members of the discourse would argue about the 'correct' meaning of typographical conventions since it is not possible to settle on only one interpretation.

Example 2 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001)

Refer to lines 6 and 10. Suggest a reason why the poet left extra space between "move" and "agitate", and between "fingers" and "they". (2)

The above question was based on the extract below from *The Nightwatchman* by Fhazel Johennesse.

then i see his fingers move agitate
and briefly a flicker of firelight
paints a smile on his face and then
melts it again
i watch his fingers they slowly
slip across the scalloped edge
of the knobkerrie

Another example of a structure question is one set on Louis Macneice's poem, *Prayer before birth*. Below follows a stanza exemplifying the structure of the poem as a whole (all the stanzas have a similar structure) and thereafter the question.

Example 3 (cf. Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002)

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take when
old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector me, mountains
frown at me, lovers laugh at me, the white
waves call me to folly and the desert calls
me to doom and the beggar refuses
my gift and my children curse me.

*Suggest a reason why the poet has set out his poem the way he has (the structure of the stanzas).*¹² (2)

The obscurity of the answer to the above question (cf. fn 12), leads me to conclude that to arrive at this answer the candidate would have had to *accept* a particular interpretation of the structure of the poem. If the educator and the learner had *agreed* (reached consensus) on this interpretation of the poem's structure, then the answer given in the examination would derive from the practical interest (cf. chap 2: 2.2.2). However, negotiation and consensus depend on the equality and equal rights of the participants. From a discursive perspective, to be able to contribute equally, persons must have equal status (cf. chap 2: 2.2.5). In the school environment, learners and educators do not have equal status. Learners are constrained in contesting validity claims and therefore power hierarchies (Seidman 1998: 190-91). In the school environment knowledge is viewed as a method that must be implemented to reach an objective: the objective is passing the SC examination. Knowledge is thus viewed from the perspective of the technical interest, which seeks to produce the learning outcomes and is focused on product (cf. chap 2: 2.2.1).

The ESL candidate may arrive at the 'correct' answer in the examination if s/he has learned the analysis of a particular poem by rote; in other words, through memorizing and reproducing the particular interpretation supplied by the teacher as is the common practice. When studying a poem at school it is common practice to analyse it line by line. This interpretation of the meaning of each line is then adopted by the learner. This practice existed when I matriculated in 1970 and Examiner C (p.10) confirmed that this is still the practice.

Example 4 (Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Preludes)

Why is line 13 separate from the rest of Preludes 1? (2)

Below follows the extract on which the question was based:

1

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.

¹² Answer: Sloping lines suggest loss of power/ weakness/ a sense of increasing urgency.

The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And then the lighting of the lamps.

2

The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms. [etc.]

With reference to Example 4 above, Examiner B (p.15) explained:

I want them [the learners] to make the connection here that... by changing the structure, by placing this line separate from the rest, the poet is actually trying to stress it because it's meaning differs from what we usually think... from what we usually associate with lights. Does the candidate understand why the lighting of the lamps isn't a positive here as it would usually be?

In other words, the candidate is being asked to demonstrate whether s/he understands how typographical convention affects meaning. 'Autonomous Text' discourse assumes that conclusions can be drawn from examining a proposition expressed as, say, a sentence and the conventions which are used to record it in writing, without relying on prior knowledge or other 'texts' (Popkewitz 1995;

Fairclough 1992). However, for the candidate to be in a position to give the required answer, s/he must have access to the particular discourse that views the lighting of lamps (pre the discovery of electricity, the lamplighter would physically light the lamps in the streets of cities like London) as having any significance other than providing light. Although this discourse is relatively widespread because of its use in religious texts such as the Bible, only as a member of a particular discourse would one make the association that light wards off or dispels darkness and can therefore be viewed as positive. In the words of Examiner E (p.3): “learners have to find the words and structures in their own experience”. Examiner E’s observation supports the contention that the words (ideas) must be part of the learner’s experience of life, of the discourse of which s/he is a member. Unfortunately for the candidates, not all learners are able to draw on the same experiences.

Interestingly, in this context it is also important to note that questions requiring learners to derive meaning from the use of typographical conventions used in poems and prose take no account of the effect of poetry or prose being read aloud. Although a convention such as a dash would indicate a pause in reading or a change in intonation pattern or pitch, in a spoken text another convention (the pause or change in intonation) would be used to cue meaning. This is a good example of how meaning does not reside in the forms of a written text.

Another instance where it is assumed that conclusions can be drawn from the text without recourse to prior knowledge or other contextual forms is in the setting of questions on tone. According to Halliday (1985), tone refers to the choice of pitch contrast the speaker makes. The way tone is used is language-specific. In English, for example, the contrast is normally limited to a rise or fall, or a combination of the two. However, this was not the meaning ascribed to tone by examiners. By tone examiners are referring to the pragmatic intention, or illocutionary force that it is assumed a character used in a particular line, or lines, of text as exemplified below:

Example 1 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text The Great Gatsby)

Describe the tone of voice Nick would most likely use when he says these words. Give a reason for your opinion. (In other words, how is this tone suggested by Nick’s words?) (3)

The fact that the question implies that the tone of voice can be suggested by Nick’s words, supports the argument that examiners believe that the text is autonomous and

that its meaning can be retrieved by applying oneself to the words on the page. Moreover, examiners did not appear to realize that non-native speakers of a language fail to pick up pragmatic intention, for example, sarcasm (Halliday 1985), which explains why Examiner A (p.26) observed that candidates “have traditionally struggled with [tone questions]”.

Notwithstanding the difficulty candidates experience with tone questions, the following additional examples of tone questions were found in the examination papers:

Example 2 (cf. Gauteng HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Macbeth)

In what tone of voice would Macbeth say ‘Glamis and Thane of Cawdor;

The greatest is behind.’ (lines 16 and 17) (2)

Example 3 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Julius Caesar)

The tone Cassius is using in this speech to Brutus is

A accusing

B offensive

C grateful

D rude (1)

In a few instances candidates are asked to decide on the tone of an entire poem.

Example 4 (Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Anthem for Doomed Youth)

The tone of the poem is

A bitter

B curious

C forlorn

D triumphant (1)

As in the previous examples of questions on the effects of the use of literary devices (discussed in detail), I argue that candidates could not arrive at the answers to the questions in examples 2, 3 and 4 above without recourse to past experience, background knowledge and/or other texts.

Example 5 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2002; text Upon Westminster Bridge)

From the exclamation, "Great God!", we can see that the poet is filled with

A reverence

B disgust

C pride

D admiration

(1)

The required answer to Example 5 would be neither obvious nor accessible unless one was a member of the particular discourse that would recognize the answer as A, reverence. A candidate could also decide on C, pride, or D, admiration. The particular social text that associates 'reverence' with 'God' needs to be referred to, to arrive at answer A. Halliday (1978) points out how bits of information are backgrounded or foregrounded, taken as given or presented as new, and how a part of a text is linked to preceding and following parts of the text and to the social situation outside the text. The individual cannot make sense of the world (create meaning or be understood), or of the text without relying on these other texts. Literature makes use of the term 'intertextuality' (Kristeva 1986), which is the explicit presence of one text (or in the case of social action, many texts) within another; what Fairclough (1992: 102) refers to as the insertion of history (society) into a text. Tone questions, particularly, cannot be answered without resorting to other texts.

To summarise, the discourse constructing ESL learners as needing to be able to explain the effects of literary devices is that of the 'Autonomous Text'. I have argued that learners need access to specific discourses to construct meaning from certain texts. Candidates refer to other texts, prior knowledge and their own experiences when constructing meaning; they have to make links between and within existing frames of reference. I have also argued that in setting questions on irony and tone, cultural assumptions are being made about the homogeneity of learners' frames of reference.

'Autonomous Text' discourse also manifests in the reading comprehension section of Paper 1. The reading comprehension section treats the text as if conclusions can be drawn from sentence meanings without recourse to prior knowledge or other contextual forms. Examiner C (p.4) remarked that "comprehension is general knowledge", meaning that the comprehension section of the language and comprehension paper tests general knowledge. Examiner B (p.10) added that learners were encouraged to increase their general knowledge. However, I argue that setting questions on a text is a specific literacy practice which is taught in schools and which is characteristic of school based literacies: learners are taught that the answers are contained in the text. This is problematic at HE level where students are encouraged to use other texts to challenge the claims made in a text.

An example of a comprehension from Paper 1 (cf. SG 2001) (consisting of the entire text and all its related questions) has been reproduced for purposes of this discussion.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

By Brad Eckert, Young People's Press

1. I've often wondered how we as humans, measure success. Do we say that someone is successful when they are always happy? Or have a lot of money? Or bump elbows with the stars? Or is something different? The other day while reading through a magazine I discovered a poem that seemed to give me the answer. It's called "What is success?" by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

What is success?

To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people

and the affection of children;

To appreciate beauty;

To find the best in others;

To know even one life has breathed

easier because you have lived;

This is to have succeeded.

2. We've been struggling with this definition for so many years. Look at today's

celebrities: the people that our society admires the people who in our eyes can do no wrong. When you study their past you'll notice something very interesting. They fought to get where they are and, a lot of times on their first try, they failed. They also ignored what people said, when necessary.

3. Everyone knows the story about the basketball star, Michael Jordan. He was cut from his high school basketball team. What if he listened to the coach and decided to never try basketball again? What if he just gave up because he was deemed a failure? Then there's Walt Disney, the creator of the million dollar giant, Walt Disney World. He was fired from his first newspaper job because he had no "creativity". Look what happened. Beethoven was told at an early age that he had no talent for music. The Beatles were turned down because "Groups with guitars were on their way out". The filmmaker, Woody Allen, failed motion picture production at New York University. The list goes on.

4. Don't let others predict your future for you. We're all capable of achieving our dreams and don't need help from others to work this out. So, you fail a few times. Is that going to end your future? No! We all make mistakes.

5. So what is success? Is it something that others predict for us? Do we let others tell us who we will be, how we will stand, what to wear, and everything else? Of course we do! We're teens. We follow society. We learn by example and then do our best to copy the "trend".

6. But that's not how success is measured. It's measured by who you are and what you stand for. Don't be known for something that you didn't create.

7. Create your own style and follow your own way. Be known for something that you can be proud of in twenty years. As Emerson said: 'make a difference'.

1.1 Choose the correct answer from the options given and write down only the number of the question and the letter of the option you choose, for example, 1.1

F.

The expression 'to bump elbows' as we find it in paragraph 1 means to...

A. fight with someone

B. exercise together

C. admire from afar

D. mix with other people.

(2)

The expression 'to bump elbows' is idiomatic. Proverbs, parables, adages, aphorisms, riddles and verses preserve important cultural information and are not explicit, but require recourse to prior knowledge and social context for their interpretation (cf. 4.3.1.1). However, autonomous text discourse assumes that the text will deliver up the meaning.

1.2 List THREE things mentioned in paragraph 1 that we normally consider to be part of success. (3)

Examiner B (p.6) stated that the candidate has to be able to look for main ideas. While this question might be set with the intention of getting candidates to do this, it is essentially what might be termed a 'referential' question in that the candidate is *told* that at least three things normally considered to be part of success are mentioned in the passage. Reading is then merely a matter of referring to the text to identify these three things. Above all, however, it exemplifies the idea that meaning is 'in' the text and would presumably penalize a student who challenged the text and contributed his/her own ideas about what constituted success. At least two sets of phenomena are at play here. Firstly, the candidate has to subscribe to / engage with the literacy practice of answering questions by referring only to one text and not other texts. Secondly, the candidate needs to understand 'success' in the same ways as the author of the comprehension passage – that is, s/he needs to draw on the same discourses defining it.

1.3 In your OWN WORDS, state what the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson believes a truly successful person will KNOW at the end of his/her life. (2)

As well as proceeding from the assumption that the text is autonomous, Question 1.3 manifests an overlap with 'Received Tradition' discourse as it requires the candidate to paraphrase. The same is true of questions 1.5 and 1.8.

1.4 State whether the following statements are TRUE or FALSE and QUOTE to support your answer:

1.4.1 It has always been easy for us as humans to understand success. (2)

1.4.2 We believe celebrities are perfect. (2)

Examiner B (p.6) stated that a candidate has to interpret facts that are given. "Are the facts true or false in the given context of the passage?" exemplified in 1.4.2 above and 1.9 and 1.14 below.

1.5 Which TWO secrets of success can people learn from the experiences of famous people? Answer in your OWN WORDS. (4)

1.6 Choose the correct answer from the options given and write down only the question number and the letter of the option you choose.

Michael Jordan should be admired because he...

A. is a famous American basketball player.

B. didn't give up when things went wrong

C. listened to the advice of his coach

D. realized he was a failure and gave up (2)

Examiner B (p.6) stated that the candidate is asked to infer from given information and draw a conclusion, exemplified in 1.6. In many respects, this question requires the application of the rules of informal logic in that it can be answered by eliminating 'wrong' answers. The assumption that answers can be derived by the application of logic driven rules is firmly rooted in the idea that texts are autonomous of the contexts in which they are produced and interpreted. Interestingly, the question also requires candidates to know who Michael Jordan is – an assumption which cannot necessarily be made in the South African context.

1.7 Why was Walt Disney fired from his first job? (2)

1.8 In your OWN words, say why the Beatles were discouraged to perform. (2)

1.9 State whether the following statement is TRUE or FALSE and QUOTE to support your answer:

Woody Allen did well in all his subjects at University. (2)

1.10 Choose the most suitable answer from the options given and write down only the question number and the letter of the answer you choose.

In paragraph 4 the author tells us that we are 'capable' of reaching our dreams. In this context, the word 'capable' means...

A. responsible

B. unable

C. *competent*

D. *guilty* (2)

Examiner B (p.6) noted that the candidate has to be able to deduce the meaning of a word from a sentence – exemplified in 1.10 above. The discourse of the ‘Autonomous Text’ leads examiners to believe that this is possible without recourse to background knowledge, past experience and/or other texts. In the case of all these examples, candidates from rural homes with no access to television or cinema might well not have access to the background knowledge to be able to make the meanings required of them.

1.11 *Why, according to paragraph 4, should we not be disappointed when we make mistakes?* (2)

The answer to 1.11 provided on the memorandum confirms that candidates are penalized for challenging the text – as suggested previously in this discussion. As part of the answer to this question, the memorandum specifically stated that candidates may not answer “We learn from our mistakes”¹³. This answer is not ‘in the text’, but could be constructed through recourse to other texts or past experience.

1.12 *In paragraph 5 the author talks about ‘we’ and ‘us’. To which group of people does he belong?* (2)

To answer 1.12, the candidate must identify “teens” (paragraph 5 of the text) as a “group of people”. Again the candidate would have to draw on the same discourses as the examiner and author of the text to make this association.

1.13 *According to the author, TWO things happen when we follow the rules of society. What are these two things?*¹⁴ (4)

1.14 *State whether the following statement is TRUE or FALSE and QUOTE to support your answer:*

*We should be known for our own originality.*¹⁵ (2)

¹³ Because it will not end our future. / Everybody makes mistakes (May quote: Is that going to end our future? No! We all make mistakes) OR any words to this effect. *NOT: we learn from our mistakes.*

¹⁴ The answers to this question (and question 1.14) are by no means obvious. Memorandum answer: We learn from society OR We learn by example AND We copy the trends.

As noted earlier, question 1.14 requires candidates to interpret given facts. However, the answers to this question and 1.13 provided on the memorandum (cf. fn 8 & 9) illustrate that facts are not 'given', but that it requires recourse to other contexts and texts to firstly, construct meaning when reading a text and secondly, relate this 'knowledge' to other knowledge to provide the specific answers that are being sought.

Examiner B's (p.6) hypothesis is that comprehension tests reading skill:

...particularly because the comprehension is based on the fact that the candidate has to understand what he reads in order to answer the questions...

Examiner D also equated comprehension skills with "the ability to be able to read a passage and understand it" (p.4), observing that "...the questions are not always put in such a way as to test whether the child actually has comprehended the passage" (p.6).

Notwithstanding 'Autonomous Text' discourse that sites meaning in the text, examiners were concerned that the comprehension passage should be "accessible" to all the candidates; that it should "fit into all their frameworks of reference" (Examiner B, p.3) as "...you know you're setting it from your own framework of reference" (p.17). The same concern was expressed by Examiner A (p.3) in discussing his choice of poetry for inclusion in the literature paper. Examiner A wanted to choose a poem that was "more relevant to the pupils' experience". I therefore conclude that examiners are aware that learning must relate to the learner's experience in some way. For a poem or comprehension passage to be relevant to a learner's experience, according to Kolb (1984) s/he has to test the 'knowledge' contained in the poem / passage against his/her own experience. However, the background knowledge ESL learners bring to the text is often culture-specific (Steffensen, Joag-dev & Anderson 1979; Carrell & Eisterhold 1989), so, with reference to the comprehension passage above, to reiterate a candidate's perception of what it means to be successful may differ from the writer's perception. Moreover,

¹⁵ Memorandum answer: True. "Don't be known for something you didn't create." OR / "Create your own style..."

the diversity of candidates writing the SC examination makes it very difficult to choose a comprehension passage or poem which would be relevant to all learners' experience.

The perception that language is "instrumentary" – resulting in meaning being overlooked (Christie 1993: 88) – is revealed in the following anecdote related by Examiner D (p.21):

I remember saying to them [other examiners] How can you use UFOs in a standard grade paper? And their argument was we're not testing their knowledge of UFOs. We're testing their knowledge of summarizing.

This comment exemplifies the way in which it is believed that language can be assessed separately from the discourse that gave rise to it. Moreover, there appears to be no understanding that comprehension will be facilitated if the reader is interested in the subject matter and it relates well to his/her background (Coady 1979).

A fourth instance where language and its structure are being assessed separately from the discourse that gave rise to it, is in the point form summary. Examiner F (p.5) described the point form summary as a "study skill" that was needed in a number of professions and "applies to a very wide range of work situations". Examiner F echoes the discourse that currently seems to be the thrust of the SA education system – that which focuses on the vocational needs of learners (cf. chap 1: 1.2.1; Blunt *In press*). Not unrelated is Examiner D's comment concerning the SC examination as a whole:

I think they [the Education Department] see it [the SC] as... the need to ... make their [the learners'] way in the world. A gateway into getting into society, into getting their jobs, into being able to cope in the real world (p.13).

Examiner D's comments reflect the discourses of the past and simultaneously, current discourses. One such discourse maintains that English is a major language of trade, commerce and banking – what Kachru (1986: 132) calls the "marketability strategy" of a language. Another maintains that English is necessary to acquire knowledge in the sciences, technology and humanities (Kachru 1986).

Examiner B (p.6) described summarizing as

...extracting the essence of the main ideas from a larger unit of information. We also ask them particularly to extract certain information....

Examiner B felt that this skill “is necessary for tertiary studies” (p.6), but added

...we get candidates now that can't write a summary because it's a skill that has to be taught... And I think that's the major shortcoming in our system at this point. It's the fact that the teachers themselves aren't equipped to teach the candidates what they have to know in order to pass the paper (p.4).

On the other hand, Examiner D (p.23) felt that in province D educators could teach summary writing skills since they had been extensively “workshopped” to enable them to do so.

Examiner D (pp.6-7) described summary writing as follows:

...an important life skill... that [one] will use for the rest of [one's] life... and ... a critical part of English... the summary passage... must never contain words that are beyond their vocab. It's got to be simple straight-forward English... totally accessible.

This examiner felt that the summary taught “comprehension... and the ability to pick out main points” (p.8), skills s/he cited as being very important for tertiary education. Applebee (1984: 585) refers to the summary as “repetition”, as note-taking that *reflects* passage organization; and contrasts it with note-taking that *reorganizes* information from a passage. Geisler (1994 citing Applebee 1981) understands that selecting important information (that is, the main points in a text) does not benefit learners in the same way that reordering and paraphrasing (rendering the information using one’s own words) does. Viewing the writing process as facilitating the processing of thought (Zamel 1982) supports Geisler’s contention, since in this view the act of writing allows one to explore one’s thoughts and clarify what those thoughts are (Boughey 1997). However, Garner (1990) warns that it is unrealistic to think that writing will always facilitate the exercise and development of metacognitive strategies.

Below follows an example of a summary writing question taken from the HG ESL 2001 language and comprehension examination paper.

Example 1

At the Jockey Academy, young men, apart from being trained to be good jockeys, also gain other advantages from their training.

With this statement in mind, read through the passage 'Training' and list these advantages in not more than 70 words.

- *Your summary must be in point form.*
- *List at least 7 facts.¹⁶*
- *Number the facts 1 through 7.*
- *Write down only one fact per line.*
- *Use full sentences.*
- *Use your own words as far as possible.*
- *Indicate the number of words you have used in brackets at the end of your summary.*
- *You will be penalized for exceeding the maximum number of words or failing to indicate the number of words used.¹⁷*

The passage follows.

¹⁶ Betram's (2003) study found that when students were asked 'Discuss what you consider to be the five most important principles of holistic outcomes-based assessment' they searched through the material for a heading "five principles" for 15 minutes until the coordinator intervened and advised them that there was no such heading. Betram's research showed that students struggled to understand the concept of principles and how these could be drawn from the text as a whole.

¹⁷ Possible answers (from the memorandum):

1. They learn courage.
2. They earn money while they learn.
3. They receive a comprehensive education at least up to Gr.10.
4. They are taught good manners.
5. They are taught to speak well.
6. They are taught to dress tastefully.
7. They are taught to be honest.
8. They are taught loyalty.
9. They may leave with considerable savings.
10. They become gentlemen.

TRAINING

A youngster wishing to become a jockey must apply to the Jockey Club of South Africa. Applicants are examined and if successful at the final interview, they are sent to the Jockey Academy at Shongweni.

All apprentice jockeys sign training contracts, binding them for five years. For that period they are away from home and usually spend the first two years at the Academy and the following three years at Apprentice hostels in Johannesburg or Cape Town.

The Academy caters for up to 40 apprentice jockeys at a time. Whilst these boys are being taught this profession, they receive compulsory academic education up to Grade 10 and, in the case of those capable, up to matriculation standard.

Because riding racehorses is one of the most demanding sports in the world and requires courage and intelligence, the training at the Academy is designed to produce these qualities in jockeys of the future. On the other hand, it is one of the few educational institutions where students can earn while they learn, and when they complete their training, they often graduate with considerable savings. They generally qualify at the age of 20. The boys now embark on a career through which they can earn a very substantial income.

The Academy is run on the lines of a private boarding school. Apart from the comprehensive education given, the strictest attention is paid to instilling good manners, good speech, dressing tastefully and a rigid sense of honesty and loyalty. The aim is not only to turn out first class jockeys, but gentlemen as well.

Although examiners described summarizing as a “study skill” (Examiner F, p.5) and “...necessary for tertiary studies” (Examiner B, p.6) the summary is being approached as a school-based literacy practice. The practice is guided in a way it would never be at HE level (In the example above, candidates are guided to provide seven facts.) Applying this particular school-based learned competence at HE level, or in the world of work will not lead to the same results. At HE level a summary shows whether a student *understands* the texts s/he has drawn on and is often a synopsis of the texts of others. Interestingly, Examiner B’s (p.6) description of the précis, which has been “done away with” (*ibid.*) corresponds more closely to what is required of students at HE:

...they had to condense a large amount of facts and knowledge...

On the other hand, being able to summarise in the work environment might entail following an instruction manual in order to assemble a piece of machinery or deciding on what was important for the minutes of a meeting. Although Examiner F (p.5) pointed out that the summary was “brought in specifically... because it’s a study skill”, s/he was aware that it was not necessarily addressing FET needs:

... it’s something that I think we still need to address in our exam to see that it’s utilized to its fullest potential (p.5).

Examiner D explained how the summary question could also be set out as a dialogue where one ‘speaker’ is in favour of a topic (for example, *lebola*) and the other against. “And then as summary you’ve got to pick out just the advantages. And ... so there is comprehension” (p.7). For this examiner, then, comprehension occurs once meaning has been extracted from the text. At another level, Examiner D is also implying that if the candidate can comply with the demands of the question it follows that s/he comprehends the text. However, this examiner (p.7) observed that expecting L2 learners to extract the main points (as opposed to, for example, just the advantages) was unrealistic: “That I believe is too complex for second language learners”. The assumption here would appear to be that meaning can only be extracted from the text with sufficient guidance (by, for example, keying candidates into the word ‘advantage’ rather than simply allowing them to list main points). While this compromises the examiner’s position *vis a vis* the discourse of the ‘Autonomous Text’, it also provides an example of another discourse, the ‘Compromise’ discourse (discussed below), which constructs candidates’ needs according to an assessment of what *can* be asked of them.

To summarise, in this section the discourse of the ‘Autonomous Text’ has been shown to require candidates to ‘find the meaning’ of literary devices used in the texts found on the literature papers. Secondly, it has been shown that this discourse manifests in questions on the typographical conventions of texts selected for use in the literature papers. Thirdly, this discourse has been shown to manifest in questions on tone (found in the literature papers), which require candidates to understand the pragmatic intention, or illocutionary force that it is assumed a particular character used in a particular line, or lines of text.

I have argued that candidates need access to specific discourses to construct meaning from texts. Candidates refer to other texts, prior knowledge and own experience when constructing meaning. When setting questions on irony and tone,

cultural assumptions are being made about the homogeneity of candidates' frames of reference, which disadvantages candidates from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

As this section of the chapter also illustrates, the 'Autonomous Text' discourse also manifests in the language and comprehension paper in questions on reading comprehension and in those that require candidates to write a point form summary. This discourse leads examiners to believe that the text will deliver up the meaning (for example, of idioms, facts, individual words) without recourse to background knowledge, past experience or other texts. However, examiners expressed concern that the comprehension passage should be accessible to all candidates, which leads me to conclude that they are aware that learning must relate to the learner's experience in some way. The diversity of candidates writing the SC examination makes it difficult to choose a comprehension passage relevant to all learners.

The following section addresses two literature-related discourses constructing L2 learners' needs at HE level, namely, 'Literature Study Develops Language Proficiency' and 'Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life'.

4.3.2 Literature-related Discourses

4.3.2.1 Literature Study Develops Language Proficiency

Examiners believed that studying literature develops language proficiency; in other words, that it improves reading, writing and comprehension.

Poetry requires a lot of English skills, so if the candidate can master poetry s/he has mastered quite a few of the background English skills... language skills, comprehension skills, expression skills, writing skills... all of those skills combine in the study of poetry (Examiner A, p.3).

Examiner A is correct that understanding poetry requires a high level of language proficiency; however, studying poetry will not equip one with these skills unless one is a member of a particular "community of practice" (Wegner, McDermott & Snyder 2002. An effective learner learns practice in relational contexts (Prinsloo 2000) and, thus, to participate in communities of practice (cf. 4.3.1.1). Gee (2004 b: 78) feels that a "community of practice" is a "label" for a group of people that must then be identified in terms of its members. Gee prefers to use the term "affinity space", which he sees as a space where people have an affinity with, or for the endeavour or interest around which the 'space' is organized, rather than firstly with the other

people. Within the space people “interact with the content, or with one another over the content” (for example, poetry). This is different from, but not unrelated to Fairclough’s (1997, 1985) “speech community”, which refers to the way in which an institution simultaneously facilitates and constrains social action. Within the institution there is a “frame for action” – in this case the study of poetry at school – and people are constrained to act within the frame (Fairclough 1997, 1985). In other words, to be perceived as members of the discourse they are “subjected” to the institutional frame (Fairclough 1985: 749). One of the ways in which they are subjected is that they must have the language to express themselves “appropriately” within the discourse (Gee 1996) and many ESL learners do not ‘have’ this language.

Examiner B (p.7) believed that literature study develops language proficiency:

*...literature to me is primarily about teaching them to express themselves.
That’s why the whole focus is on ‘own words’....*

Here Examiner B reflects ‘Language as an Instrument of Communication’ discourse (cf. 4.3.1.2). By point of comparison, Examiner E (p.2) believed that learning the vocabulary to discuss a poem

*...broadens the vocabulary base in the learner to discuss emotions, feelings,
economic situations, poverty.*

Examiner E (p.2) added that it is

*...important... to encourage discussion and debate around elements of the
human condition explored in, protested about through, and stated in poetry.*

Examiner E thus reveals that she understands that interaction (“discussion and debate”) is a necessary part of the learning process. This examiner asserted that “learners have to find the words and structures in their own experience” (Examiner E, p.3), which echoes Kolb (1984) who maintains that new knowledge must be tested against one’s own experience. Learners also need other texts (Fairclough 1992) to which they can refer to create meaning from poetry (cf. chap 2: 2.2.2). This is in contrast to the tendency to assume that the meaning is in the text alone and dismiss individual experience and other texts as being irrelevant to constructing meaning, which dates back to when print literacy gained ascendancy and premises no longer rested on common experience or commonsense intuition, but on empirical data (Olson, 1977) (cf. 4.3.1.1).

Examiner A saw mastery of language as an ability to write about poetry “in the way that will give them [candidates] marks”. However, Ascher (1990 cited in Israel 2000) warns that if learners are taught with the aim of improving scores, once they have conformed they are regarded as having successfully learned whereas this may not be the case at all. This is the result of establishing context-independent modes of thinking: the written word is separated from the thing it stands for in the same way that school is separated from life (Applebee 1984). Gee (2004b: 117) criticizes schools for focusing learning on the facts and principles around a given domain, which he terms the “content fetish”. Conformity of learning is the result of viewing knowledge from the perspective of the technical interest (Habermas 1972), which is concerned with measuring and summarizing how much information the individual learner has acquired. This practice creates many problems for students in HE where knowledge is viewed differently. At HE level students are expected to understand the way language is used to construct knowledge; “to explore and construct claims” (Bougey 2002: 299); in other words, that language is a resource to make sense of life’s experiences (Christie 1985) and of texts.

Examiner E (p.2) conflated writing and understanding character:

Literature can be used to help learners write for transactional purposes, as understanding the characters enables the role play required for learning how to write.

From Gee’s (2004a) perspective this examiner is partially correct. Gee (2004a: 65) explains that it is necessary for learners to “project their identities” (their own values and desires) if they wish to become part of a group or be identified with a certain role. Hull and Rose’s (1990) research found that when summarizing, rather than copying verbatim students identify with certain aspects of text and appropriate them while simultaneously changing the language, which Hull and Rose interpret as bound up with a desire to grow. Gee (2004a: 66) describes the “projective identity” as “the interface between one’s real-world identities and the virtual identity”. The challenge for educators lies in the fact that learners have to *choose* to identify with the roles; they have to want to “carry learning so far as to take on a projective identity” (Gee 2004a: 66). In the SC examination there is also the question of whether the identities in literature are too far removed culturally and socially from the values and desires of ESL learners.

Although, literature can be used to show learners that in literature transactions (interactions) take place between characters; understanding the characters will not teach writing because writing is a situated, embedded practice and the role played while engaging in the practice is determined by the social context (cf. 4.1.1.3). Literature could be the catalyst to exemplify that dialogue occurs between characters and that it is necessary to understand the concept of dialogue to write for transactional purposes, but so could the interview.

Examiners felt that *reading* literature improves language proficiency.

Sandy: What do you feel is the aim of the literature paper in terms of student needs, language needs?

Examiner F: ... one can only answer this in light of the tradition that has built up... part of educating a child in English is to educate the child also in terms of the literature...if the child reads a novel, he reads short stories, he reads Shakespeare, this is exposure to English so the reading feeds into the proficiency... I would see the literature component as part of the education that a school must provide (p.11).

However, Geisler (1994) cites research showing that reading textbook material, particularly, has a limited impact on learning because students learn the information only when it is compatible with their prior knowledge. Moreover, in the assessment situation, the tasks that are required are not actual reading, but a simulation since the act of reading is controlled by another person (Edelsky 1996).

Examiner A (p.28) makes a connection between insight and reading:

We're looking for that kind of insight. That kind of deep reading by the pupil...

From a constructivist point of view, "deep reading" must be facilitated to ensure that learners build on existing knowledge to create new understanding (Kolb 1984). In his explanation of the process of "interpretation of discourse", Lamb (2002: 275) asserts that meaning is not conveyed by a text – as 'Language is an Instrument of Communication' discourse (cf. 4.3.1.2) would have us believe – but that incorporating new information means building connections. Elements of the text activate meanings in the minds of interpreters (Gee 1996). Lamb's (2002) understanding is that a text cannot be interpreted except by constructing a "content representation", which is connected while it is being built, to those parts of the interpreter's internal information

system. Therefore understanding a text consists of relating the results of its decoding to the already present information.

To summarise, examiners believed that studying English literature improves reading, writing and comprehension. However, this is a misperception: learners acquire skills as members of communities of practice; in other words, through 'apprenticeship' to groups of people who share certain sets of practices. Since these practices are socially embedded, access is also dependent on access to the discourses through which the practices are constituted.

Literature study was also perceived as enabling learners to understand life. Questions reflecting this discourse were manifest in the ESL literature examination papers (the discussion follows).

4.3.2.2 Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life

A tenet of *The Newbolt Report* (1921: 20 cited in Prinsloo 2002: 56; and cf. 4.3.1.1) is that literature is "an equipment for the understanding of life". Although *The Newbolt Report* appeared more than 80 years ago, the sentiments expressed in the quotation above still permeate the South African education system. This study has revealed that literature is perceived as teaching learners about the experience of life and giving them insight into life's experiences (Examiner A, p.4). Examiner A added,

...literature is learning about life and all of its facets (p.28)...The themes that Shakespeare touched on are as relevant today as they were then (p.8).

Examiner A's comments on Stephen Spender's *My parents kept me from children who were rough* illustrate the link this examiner makes between literature and life:

It's a youngster... it's all about society, prejudices. I think lots of us go through some version of this (p.4).

Examiner A set the following questions on this poem:

Example 1 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001)

Who threw words like stones... (line 2)

(a) *What figure of speech is present in these words?* (1)

(b) *How does this figure of speech demonstrate the effect these words must have had on the poet?* (2)

In the learning situation, the assumption therefore appears to be that the identification and exploration of a literary device will allow learners to reflect upon their own experiences and thus learn more about life. While there is no doubt that literature does allow one to reflect on one's own experiences, the argument that the analysis of literary devices will facilitate this process is somewhat dubious. In the assessment situation, however, the assumption that literature will allow learners to learn about life needs to be interrogated more critically. Are learners expected to learn about life in the course of the analysis of texts in a two-hour examination? If so, questions such as Example 1 above do not test that learning but rather the ability to analyse the effect of literary devices in making meaning.

Referring to Mtshali's *An abandoned bundle*, Examiner A (p.5) felt that poverty was the experience of life that learners would relate to most. Examiner E (p.2) felt that the poem was worth studying for "its commentary on society in general as well as its specific protest stance". Examples 2 and 3 below, set by Examiners A and E, respectively, relate to Mtshali's *An abandoned bundle*.

Example 2 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001)

(a) The poet seems to suggest that the baby's mother is completely innocent in this tragedy. Why is this hard for the reader to accept? (2)

(b) Suggest an explanation for the poet's reasoning in (a). (2)

In the light of Examiner A's comment (above), it could be assumed that in setting the above question this examiner would wish candidates to attribute the mother's action in abandoning her infant on a rubbish heap to the fact that she was too poor to support a child. Part a) of the question intimates that candidates would not (and should not) condone this action. From this perspective, then, and as discussed earlier, the 'Received Tradition' discourse that wishes to instill a particular moral perspective prescribes how the candidate should answer the question rather than allowing a more open-ended interpretation of the text. A more negotiated interpretation would allow learners to draw on their own experiences and background knowledge to construct meaning from the poem.

Example 3 (cf. IEB HG Paper 2 – 2002)

You have been appointed as the defence lawyer handling the case of the mother who has abandoned her baby.

Attempt to prove that she should not be found guilty. Suggest reasons for her actions and explain who/what else could be blamed for her actions.

(5)

Example 3 could be viewed from Gee's (2004 a) "projective identity" perspective since it could be argued that the candidate is required to imagine him/herself as a defence lawyer. However, since the question again requires candidates to condone the mother's action, candidates are prohibited from reflecting on and understanding their own values and desires in identifying themselves with the role. The question appears to have a specific moral aim rather than enabling candidates to understand life through understanding themselves.

The tradition of teaching English literature was clearly articulated by the examiners interviewed in this study. Examiner A (p.8) felt that

English teaching would be incomplete without some kind of grounding in the classics... English is English and its roots are in the classical literature... modern contemporary poetry comes from there...

Kachru (1986: 137) identifies an "emotional attachment" to English which is part of its power, citing examples of how English has been given credit for phenomena such as "cultural renaissance, spread of nationalism... and neutrality". Kachru (1986) also draws attention to the psychological link between English and the identity of individuals. Examiner A's comments above stem from the fact that s/he is emotionally attached to English as it is part of his/her identity. Discourses construct identity and as agential identities, we reconstitute discourses. Examiner A (p.8) added that learners must be exposed to "what is good, what is perceived as good... the popular perception of what is literature". This begs the question of whose popular perception of what is literature. Who dictates what the canon of English literature is? According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), dominant classes impose and reproduce their culture through pedagogic action. For example, Examiner D (p.12) emphasized that in the past certain cultural groups perceived that one had not been properly educated if one had not studied Shakespeare. However, other social changes – for example, the expansion of the middle classes and the counter culture of the dominated classes – can cause changes in cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

Included in the 'Literature is a Medium for Understanding Life' discourse articulated by examiners was a belief that literature taught insight into character. For example, referring to the question posed in Example 4 below, Examiner A (p.28) remarked:

We're shooting there for insight into character... and that people don't always express what it is they mean....

Example 4 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Lamb to the Slaughter)

Give TWO reasons why it would be fair to say that the husband proves himself to be a very cold-hearted character in this extract. 2+2=(4)

Other questions dealing with character follow:

Example 5 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal HG Paper 2 – 2001: Julius Caesar)

Octavius repeats the word "Come" in line 18. This shows his determination and impatience. Give two characteristics of each of the following:

Julius Caesar

Mark Antony

Cassius

Brutus

(8)

The link between the way in which something is said (pragmatic intention), for example "Come" in the question above, and how it exposes / reveals character is obscure, particularly in the light of McKenna's (1995) observation that ESL learners have been taught English in a purely grammatical way and had no input concerning the pragmatic norms of English mother tongue speakers.

Other examples of this abound:

Example 6 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal SG Paper 2 – 2001; text Julius Caesar)

In this extract Caesar refers to himself in the third person ("Caesar"), when talking to his wife. What does this show about Caesar's character?¹⁸

Example 7 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Macbeth)

Choose ONE of the following characters and explain what lines 1 and 2 reveal about his/her character.

(i) *Lady Macbeth*

(ii) *Duncan*

(iii) *Macbeth* (4)

Lines 1-2: Duncan: There's no art

To find the mind's construction in the face:

Literature can only impart insight into characters, their emotions and life's experiences if the learner is a member of the particular discourse that sees value in analysing character, emotions and life's experiences. Many learners (ESL and EFL) do not have access to this discourse; it is not part of their life experience. Moreover, as noted above, ESL learners are unfamiliar with the pragmatic norms of English mother tongue speakers (McKenna 1995). Alternatively, learners may not experience the situations and relationships depicted in the literature in the same way.

A related idea was the following:

Examiner A (p.2): [It's the] ability to read body language, ... from facial expression to be able to determine what a person's feeling... That's emotional IQ, which is so popular nowadays... that's been taught through literature for ages...

Body language is culture-specific, however, as anyone with experience of South Africa will know. In many South African socio-cultural groups, children are taught not to meet the eyes of their elders since doing so would indicate disrespect (cf. Scollon & Scollon 1981). Similarly, the practice of accepting payment by holding out cupped

¹⁸ The answer that was provided to this question is obscure, namely: He is a king and not afraid. The prescriptive nature of this answer is the result of the compromise discourses surrounding the SC examination - discussed in 4.3.3.1.

hands could be interpreted as a begging action by anyone who did not understand that this practice is a sign of respect in some South African cultures and is something which children are taught to do from an early age.

Example 8 exemplifies Examiner A's stance.

Example 8 (cf. Western Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text The Monkey's Paw)

He sat staring blankly out at the window..." (line 1). What does this tell you about Mr White's emotional state? (1)

Examiner A (p.23) emphasized: "They've got to see that in context, in relation to... what's just happened before this...", which implies that the meaning is in the text. 'Autonomous Text' discourse (cf. 4.3.1.3) is once again manifest – in the above question and in Examiner A's response along with the belief that staring blankly is a cross-cultural indication of some sort of emotional state. It is believed that because a piece of literature exemplifies a social skill, learners will learn something about that social skill through the literature, whereas the reverse process obtains: social skills are inculcated (learned) as part of social practice (cf. chap 2: 2.2.2). Moreover, there is a lack of insight into the range of behaviours determined by cultural norms (McKenna 1995). In the assessment situation tester and test taker use different social constructions to understand any given context because they have learned in different contexts using different processes. Therefore, their situational and experiential knowledge is not the same (Blunt 2000: 33). Lamb (2002: 275) emphasizes the above point, asserting that the "linguistic-conceptual system" of every person is different from that of every other person. The meaning constructed by the reader of a text is the same as that constructed by the writer only if the two have identical information systems (i.e. "never") [emphasis in the original]. Moreover, if examiners operate within the discourse that views the text as autonomous and assume that the meaning can be retrieved from the text, the candidate is doubly disadvantaged and disempowered.

Not all teachers adhere to the popular view of the value of teaching literature. For example, Examiner D (p.12) noted that the number of schools in province D still teaching Shakespeare was "dropping dramatically". Examiner D indicated that at the time of the interview (February 2004) only about twenty percent of schools chose to teach Shakespeare. One explanation is that provided by Examiner C.

If you look at the results... year in and year out... Then I think... it's a futile exercise... because it's a foreign language – not for the learner only but for the teacher as well... let's say 60% of the teachers themselves who are teaching English their... written and spoken English might not be... classified as second language itself. It might be classified as foreign language... And so... they themselves are grappling with how to interpret Shakespeare... (pp.9-10).

A contrasting perspective, articulated by both Examiners C (p.12) and A (p.13), is that literature is for entertainment and enjoyment; to be appreciated. Examiner C (p.12) felt that

...the emphasis should be shifting in education. It should be more on ... lang[uage]... instead of literature. It should be more on... writing and... speaking... it's no longer as academic.

This perspective challenges the FETC policy document (Ministry of Education 2002) that constructs entrants to HE institutions as able to 'prove' that they can communicate at cognitive academic level of proficiency (CALP) in the university medium of instruction.

It appears that not all teachers and examiners identify with the educational discourse that perceives the teaching of Shakespeare as valuable. If examiners argue that Shakespeare is too difficult and are 'letting go' of the canon, then 'Language as an Instrument of Communication' discourse is being challenged: examiners acknowledge that learners do not have the language (the grammar, spelling and vocabulary) to convey the meaning of Shakespearean texts. Moreover, 'Autonomous Text' discourse is being questioned: if learners cannot construct meaning from Shakespearean texts (bearing in mind that this includes the notes on Shakespeare's language since Shakespearean texts are annotated), the implication is that the meaning of Shakespeare is *not* in the text. It can further be argued that examiners concede that reading Shakespeare will not improve English language proficiency. However, it cannot be argued that examiners have altered their perception that reading other more accessible (easier than Shakespeare), English literature texts improves language proficiency.

Gee (2004b) maintains that we learn through natural, instructed (overt instruction) and cultural processes. Gee emphasizes that learning to read is not a natural process like

learning to walk, or acquiring a first language: it is a cultural process. Children who learn to read successfully, do so precisely for this reason, since instruction is a much less efficient way to learn than via a cultural process. Instructed processes involve practising a skill (for example, reading) outside any contexts in which that skill is used by people who are adept at it (Gee 2004b: 13). Gee (2004b: 3) criticizes schools for doing a “poor job” at teaching children academic varieties of language and observes that poor children and children from some minority groups learn to read in school less well than more privileged children. Privileged children (from “well-off, educated homes”) often get a head-start before school and continue to receive support at home in ‘schooled’ varieties of language. Less privileged children do not (*ibid.*).

In conclusion, it has been noted that people experience life differently from the way it is depicted in English literature and that moreover, each person’s “linguistic-conceptual system” (Lamb 2002) differs from that of every other person. This is also the case with ESL learners from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is most unlikely that learners generally (and more specifically those from different cultural backgrounds) will be enabled to enhance their understanding of life’s experience through studying English literature. I therefore argue that the discourse that holds that ‘Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life’ is obscurantist: it obscures the fact that pedagogic action allows dominant classes to impose and reproduce their culture (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The discourse that holds that literature study is a medium for understanding life works through the SC curriculum to impose the values and beliefs of particular dominant groups on the ESL learner. Furthermore, it is related to the ‘Received Tradition’ discourse which claims that there is moral value in teaching English literature since English literature is a vehicle of culture and enlightenment (Christie 1993; Kachru 1986). The moral values of a particular culture are propounded in English literature, which is the vehicle being used to prescribe these values to the ESL learner.

The next section discusses those process-related (‘Compromise’) discourses identified in this study.

4.3.3 Process-related Discourses

4.3.3.1 Compromise Discourses

I have identified several process-related discourses which are constructing the needs of learners. By this I mean that discourses which are part of the process of teaching and assessment have come to dictate what can and cannot be expected of ESL

learners, their educators and learners' performance in the assessment situation. For this reason I have called these discourses 'Compromise' discourses.

The first 'Compromise' discourse concerns choice of genre in the literature papers. In Province A the short story and poetry were the genres of choice because of their perceived brevity.

Examiner A: Can I make a comment about poetry as a choice amongst our schools, the institutions? It's very popular for a number of reasons. It's easily accessible and content-wise it's attractive to teachers because it seems short... (p.1).

However, the other examiners (and the findings of this study) question whether poetry is "easily accessible". For example, Examiner B (p.1) felt that the short story and the novel could not be compared with Shakespeare and the poetry, which were described as "much more difficult". This examiner stated that Macbeth (the then choice for drama) and the poetry "is out of their [the L2 learners'] *field of experience*" (p.3). This comment appears to acknowledge that to construct meaning, learners test knowledge against their own experiences (cf. 4.3.1.3).

On the other hand, Examiner A (p.12) commented that the language of a novel like *The Great Gatsby* "goes way over the heads of the average second language English speaker". Moreover, Examiner A added that the second language teacher was not able to "do justice" to this particular text. Therefore the types of questions that Examiner A felt this type of text demanded were not asked (p.12).

In addition, Examiner C (p.4) stated that "critical analysis" was "too difficult for... second language". This comment reflects a particularly serious 'Compromise' discourse in light of the fact that the draft National Curriculum Statement (NCS) on Grades 10-12 (Department of Education 2002a) views the FET curriculum as enabling learners to use language as a tool for critical and creative thinking. It simultaneously lends weight to Janks' (2001) assertion that language and power are understood in a limited way in Curriculum 2005 (cf. chap 1: 1.2.1.1). The discourse maintaining that the L2 learner is inadequate then constructs the L2 learner's needs by determining the standard / rigour of the questions. The Summary Report on the Evaluation of the Senior Certificate Examination (2004) supports this contention: the Report concluded that cognitive and proficiency demands in ESL are low, which

disadvantages L2 learners. This is particularly the case should they seek access to HE.

Another 'Compromise' discourse constructing learners' needs concerns marker proficiency – as Examiner C's comments emphasize.

I had to teach that poem ['Prayer Before Birth' by Louis Macneice] at the marking centre to the markers... because of the quality of the marking that was coming through and so it's only then that you realize that the bulk of the people you're setting for [bearing in mind that the markers are teachers] they themselves do not understand what "Tall walls wall me" means. They interpret it in the literal sense whereas, you know, it's got a figurative meaning attached to it. So if people are not in a position to understand those nuances... it becomes a problem transferring those skills to the learner (p.10).

The particular 'Compromise' discourse manifest in Examiner C's comments is that the markers are inadequate. The inadequacy of the markers then constructs the needs of learners by determining what can be asked. Other comments related to this 'Compromise' discourse concerning markers were the following:

Examiner B (p.12): ...sometimes the marker can't distinguish or recognize different words as having the same meaning as what is printed on the memo.

Examiner F (p.13): ...a communicative paper would leave scope for subjective interpretation... if you're not sure about your markers then you have to move even more away from communicative and subjective open questions.

Examiner F's comment (above) links with Examiner D's (p.8) observations:

You have to set a paper that is marker-friendly because your markers are not able to ... mark open-ended questions... setting open-ended questions that can... either be answered yes... because, or no... because – and they're both correct – is a complete and utter no-no... You can't do it.

This examiner (p. 9) stated that the candidates were not required to go into any depth when answering:

It's superficial... it's a contextual question. Who is the speaker here? Why does he say this? What happens to him afterwards?

Analysis of the papers found that many 'contextual' (content) questions in the nature of those exemplified below (cf. Examples 1-5) were asked.

Example 1 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text Macbeth)

Who is the 'He' referred to in this line? (1)

Example 2 (cf. KwaZulu-Natal SG Paper 2 – 2001; text Sunlight in Trebizond Street)

Who or what is the "bait" (line 9) that Casper uses to try to trap the narrator? (1)

Example 3 (cf. Kwazulu Natal SG Paper 2 – 2002; text Sounding Wings)

What is Mr Beaumont's profession? (2)

Example 4 (cf. Eastern Cape HG Paper 2 – 2001; text To Kill a Mockingbird)

Who is the citizen who has prevented a crime from being committed? (1)

Example 5 (cf. Gauteng SG Paper 2 – 200; text The Schoolmaster)

What work has Jan Boetje been doing on the farm? (2)

As discussed in section 4.3.1.2 above, content questions exemplify 'Language as an Instrument of Communication' discourse, which assumes that if a candidate has the necessary grammar, spelling and vocabulary in place, these can be used to convey understanding. Although content questions rely on recall and may therefore be considered "superficial" (cf. Examiner D's observation above), questions like those posed in Examples 2 to 5 above rely on candidates using language as a resource to construct meaning.

On the other hand, if examiners are constrained in setting open-ended questions, this explains why the Summary Report on the Evaluation of the Senior Certificate (2004) concluded that cognitive and proficiency demands in ESL are low, since open-ended questions challenge cognitive processes. Moreover, the Report (2004: 7) found that there were "markers who paid lip service to the interpretive intent of the paper but

who marked facts". Although this latter observation came from History evaluators, it is the sort of information that adds fuel to this particular 'Compromise' discourse fire.

Examiner C's use of 'nuances' is pertinent (cf. text above). According to Fairclough (1997) and Gee (1996), to be a core member of any discourse the individual must acquire the particular nuances of language use and action that distinguish those who make up the core from those who are on the margins. Although Examiner C's comments may be interpreted as indicating that the markers lacked proficiency in English, this thesis contends that the problem is not a language *per se* but a discourse problem.

To elucidate, an individual's "primary discourse", according to Gee (1990), is that which forms the "foundation" for discourses acquired in later life. Gee (1990: 153) links discourse and literacy, defining literacy as "mastery or fluent control over a secondary discourse" other than the home or primary discourse. In addition to the fact that the primary discourse of different groups is not the same, certain primary discourses are closer to the educational ideal than others. As noted above (cf. chap 2: 2.2.2), Gee (2003: 33, 35) argues that students have not had equal opportunities to learn unless they have had "equivalent experiences within the relevant semiotic domain in terms of active and critical learning", or "with the relevant specific social languages". Against these criteria it can be concluded that the vast majority of learners (and educators) in South Africa have not had equivalent opportunities to learn since they have not had access to the *dominant discourses* of Western type schooling. As Foucault (1972) asserts, "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it".

Another 'Compromise' discourse pertains to mark allocation. Examiner A (p.18) observed that several years ago (i.e. pre 2002 when the interview data for this study was collected) examiners would set "chunk" questions of 5 or 6 marks which would "confuse" L2 learners. Examiners thus started breaking down questions into smaller components which required less writing. The particular 'Compromise' discourse manifest in Examiner A's observation is that L2 learners cannot cope with longer questions and answers. This perceived inadequacy on their part then determines the length of the questions.

The SC examination also differentiates between HG and SG pupils; for example, HG pupils are required to study 12 poems and SG pupils, 9 poems. The discourse operating here is that HG is collocated with being capable of 'doing more'.

4.4 Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has identified the discourses constructing ESL learners' needs at tertiary level and distinguished them as follows: meaning-related, literature-related and process-related (cf. Table 1, p.108)

The first meaning-related discourse identified is 'Received Tradition' discourse. Once language became available as print and texts came to be viewed as autonomous, English language teaching focused on the rules of grammar and spelling. Both the language and comprehension paper and the literature papers manifested a preoccupation with the rules of grammar (parsing). It is argued that this is a limited way of approaching language learning: a focus on rhetoric, on the other hand, encourages development of opinions and criticality.

Another aspect of 'Received Tradition' discourse constructing ESL learners' needs is one that holds that there is moral value in teaching English literature. I have argued that if the intention is to instill a particular cultural, moral perspective (and it has been shown that this is so), the attempt is doomed to fail. Concepts of right and wrong are based on culturally produced and accepted assumptions. Therefore it is unlikely that ESL learners will adopt the values and beliefs exemplified by fictional characters – particularly if the moral values so exemplified are foreign to, or different from those upheld in their own cultures – although an attempt on the part of educators to foster their adoption disadvantages these students, particularly in the assessment situation.

The focus on grammar rules was echoed in the literature examination papers where language was also assessed. In addition, ESL learners were constructed as needing to be able to identify and work within a metalanguage used to analyse literature, such as irony, metaphor, simile, alliteration and personification. I suggest that the discourse constructing ESL learners as benefiting from the moral exhortations contained in English literature texts has been subsumed into, or 'degenerated' into (since the high-minded ideals of the former are conspicuously absent in the latter) the discourse that constructs them as needing to be able to identify the metalanguage of literature and that these two discourses thus overlap.

Two other meaning-related discourses constructing ESL learners' needs are 'Language as an Instrument of Communication' discourse and 'Autonomous Text' discourse. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, although these discourses (and indeed all those identified) are discussed separately for the sake of clarity, the discourse that holds that the answers are in the text is linked to and overlaps with that which holds that these answers can be conveyed if the tools of language are used correctly. I have argued that a lack of awareness that meaning is constructed through recourse to other contexts, texts and the learner's experience is disadvantaging ESL candidates.

Literature-related discourses that manifested in the examination papers and interview data are that 'Literature Study Develops Language Proficiency' and that 'Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life'. The former, it has been argued, is a misperception since learners acquire skills as members of communities of practice and not discretely. In other words, the individual acquires skills through 'apprenticeship' to groups of people who share certain sets of practices. Since these practices are socially embedded, access is also dependent on access to the discourses through which the practices are constituted. An ability to identify literary devices does not therefore enable learners to use these devices to construct meaning. 'Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life' discourse is connected to that which holds that there is moral value in teaching English literature. Both discourses obscure the fact that pedagogic action allows dominant classes to impose and reproduce their culture (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The discourse that holds that 'Literature Study is a Medium for Understanding Life' works through the SC curriculum to impose the values and beliefs of particular dominant groups on the ESL learner, as does that which claims that there is moral value in teaching English literature since English literature is a vehicle of culture and enlightenment (Christie 1993; Kachru 1986). The moral values of a particular culture are propounded in English literature, which is the vehicle being used to prescribe these values to the ESL learner.

Finally, process-related discourses, or 'Compromise' discourses constructing ESL learners' needs were identified. These discourses, which are part of the process of teaching and assessment, concern the inadequacy of the ESL learner and of the markers and therefore dictate what can and cannot be expected of ESL learners in the SC examination.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the research described in this thesis was to identify the discourses constructing ESL learners' language needs in the Senior Certificate examination. As a basis for the research, Habermas's (1972) theory of cognitive interests was used as a foundation for understanding the way in which knowledge is constructed to reflect particular interests, namely, the technical, practical and emancipatory interests, as well as to understand the implications of these constructions of knowledge for assessment.

The Senior Certificate examination functions i) as a measure of achievement at school ii) as an indicator of work readiness and iii) as an indicator of the potential to succeed in higher education. The way in which learners' language related needs are constructed in the examination is therefore crucial in discussing the validity of the examination in respect of each of these three functions and also in evaluating the way in which access to the goods of society is either facilitated or denied since the examination performs an important gatekeeping role in respect of all three functions.

To identify the discourses constructing ESL learners' needs I conducted a critical discourse analysis on a representative sample of ESL SC examination papers and also interviewed six ESL examiners to corroborate the findings of the analysis. This then allowed me to identify several dominant discourses constructing ESL learners' needs. In the first place there are discourses that hold that the text is autonomous, authoritative and its meaning explicit and that if the learners can manipulate the rules of English grammar, 'have' vocabulary and can spell, they can retrieve meanings from texts they encounter in a wide range of contexts and construct texts for themselves. Learners' needs are therefore constructed in relation to having a set of language 'tools'. In the second place there are discourses that hold that the study of English literature is a medium for understanding life and that there is moral value in teaching English literature since literature is a vehicle of culture and enlightenment (Christie 1993; Kachru 1986). The moral values of a particular culture are propounded in English literature which then becomes a means of inculcating these values in the ESL learner. Learners are therefore constructed as lacking these values and their needs as having to acquire them. A third set of discourses, which I term 'compromise discourses' and which are part of the processes of teaching and assessment, concern the inadequacy of the ESL learner and of the markers and

therefore dictate what can and cannot be expected of ESL learners in the SC examination. The research shows how all of the above discourses work through the SC curriculum to impose the values and beliefs of particular dominant groups on the ESL learner.

Investigating how examiners (and by implication teachers and curriculum planners) perceive the needs of ESL learners at tertiary level highlights the contradictory nature of a system that purports to be preparing learners for the workplace and HE study. Students need particular levels of language ability to gain access to HE and the world of work. As argued in chapter 4, language elements such as vocabulary are learned in real world contexts as part of embedded, situated practice (Prinsloo 2000; Gee 2004b). They are also dependent on access to the discourses through which the practices are constituted. They are not learned in isolation as they are being taught and assessed in the SC examination; they are also not generalizable.

The remainder of this concluding chapter attempts to evaluate the legitimacy of the SC examination in terms of its intended purposes and in relation to the way it constructs the language needs of ESL learners.

5.2 Validity of the SC Examination

The construction of ESL language learners in the Senior Certificate is problematic in relation to all three functions of the examination. In terms of its use as an indicator of work readiness, discourses which construct language as a collection of facts (grammar rules, spelling, vocabulary), which candidates must learn in order to be able to convey meaning, do not recognize the socially embedded nature of language use. In addition, the text is being approached as if its meaning is explicit and can be retrieved without recourse to cultural background, own experience and other social texts. This 'formula' for language learning at SC level does not enable ESL candidates to use language as a resource to create meaning in the work environment (or in HE for that matter). The SC examination therefore fails to indicate the level of English language proficiency acquired through 12 years of schooling because of a misperception that the language 'skills' taught at school are generalizable to other contexts such as the workplace and HE institutions rather than that language is part of embedded, situated practice.

The idea that texts are autonomous of the context in which they are produced and interpreted is also evidenced in the genres of the texts included in the examination papers analysed. In the workplace, learners can be expected to need to read and

produce very specific genres. These might include memoranda, notices and manuals. There is no attempt in the examination papers to include workplace based genres as a basis for comprehension or as texts which need to be produced. Although it is acknowledged that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the examination to be inclusive of *all* genres in the face of the very diverse functions it needs to fulfill, the fact that the genres which are included in the paper tend to be 'popular', in the sense that they are adapted from magazines such as *People Magazine*, the newspaper and web sites (for example, YoungPeoplesPress.com and Freshlimesoda.com), provides evidence not only of the understanding that texts are autonomous but also that reading is a monolithic singular practice rather than a set of multiple practices. In a workplace, texts might well be read jointly with other workers (in much the same way as, for example, Brice Heath (1983) describes neighbours reading texts together). The set of practices which comprise that reading might well not be the same as the practices demanded by the reading comprehension passages favoured by examiners.

Just as the workplace demands specialist sets of language and specialist genres, so does higher education. Becher and Trowler's (2001) work on 'academic tribes and territories' identifies disciplinary differences which are deeply entrenched. More recent work (see, for example, Lea & Street 1997; North 2005) provides closer analyses of differences in the texts required by different disciplines thus supporting the idea of academic *literacies* rather than a monolithic academic literacy.

The multiplicity of language use thus makes it very difficult to develop an examination that would simultaneously indicate readiness for HE and all workplaces. The policy context outlined at the beginning of this thesis demands that differences in context be taken into account. The outcomes-based approach to education and training required by the NQF, aims to provide qualifying learners with applied competence to facilitate the transition from school to work and with a basis for further learning. Applied competence means the ability to put into practice in the relevant context the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification (SAQA 2001). I would argue that in order to demonstrate (put into practice) applied competence in workplace and academic varieties of language, a learner would have repeatedly had to *experience* concrete examples of these varieties (Gee 2004b) – repeatedly because new learning is added to old learning and needs time to be consolidated. In other words, learners would have had to be placed in situations where, through action and talk with others and with the guidance of a teacher who had focused on the 'right things' –

in much the same way that a supervisor guides a doctoral candidate – they would learn the prototypes of workplace and academic varieties of language. I use ‘prototypes’ deliberately to distinguish the situated language proficiency that learners would acquire at school from that which would still need to be learned in a particular workplace, since it is only once the new employee enters the particular workplace, or HE institution that s/he will be able to begin *developing* the prototype through practicing the various roles (assuming the various identities) required in that specific situational context.

Is there a generic variety of language found in all workplaces? The research described in this thesis is not in a position to answer that question. However, there are specific genres which are part of situated workplace practice. The danger is that teaching workplace genres will then be seen as all that is necessary (sufficient) to ‘learn’ specialized varieties of workplace language. However, it is argued that this would be inadequate since employees learn workplace literacy practices through an apprenticeship; through working with and alongside others who have acquired the practices and who are members of the discourses specific to a particular workplace.

Within different workplace discourses there are particular ways of acting, interacting and valuing. Since valuing, too, is acquired as part of situated practice, those SC discourses identified by this research that hold that moral values can be conveyed through teaching English literature, which can also be used as a medium for understanding life, are based on illusion and demonstrate the way in which dominant discourses become naturalized and perceived of as commonsense. As discussed in chapter 4, values are culture-specific and cannot be transferred through the fictional characters of English literature to peoples of other cultures.

As already noted, HE institutions, too, are socially constructed communities of practice (Becher & Trowler 2001): students have to find a way of functioning within these communities of practice and within the various discourses that have already been configured (Lea & Street 1997). At HE level students are expected to use language to explore, make connections and oppose propositions and the claims made in texts: in other words, as a literacy practice, they are expected to use language to construct, rather than reproduce, knowledge. Using other knowledge and other texts to challenge meanings in one text and arrive at understandings is characteristic of academic literacy, although not common practice at school (Geisler 1994). Yet, the demands of the current SC examination mean that instead of language being approached as a resource to enable ESL learners to understand the

ideas to which they are exposed, they are being taught discrete 'skills' (for example, summary writing) to equip them for HE study.

In the new curriculum statements for the FET band, Outcome 5 in the learning area *Language Literacy and Communication* requires learners to "know and apply language structures and conventions in context" (DoE 1997: 3). 'Knowing and applying languages structures and conventions in context' implies that language structures can be learned discretely and applied; that the text itself dictates its lexical and syntactic features. This suggests that the traditional approach to language learning of the SC remains unchanged, a phenomenon which is not difficult to appreciate given the robust nature and hegemonic character of the discourses described in this thesis. As mentioned earlier, although it is difficult to set a school leaving examination which serves both workplace and academic functions, there is a need to move beyond traditional and commonsense (that is, hegemonic) approaches to understanding language learning to a Hallidayan understanding that meaning is constructed through recourse to the context of the learner and other social texts (cf. 4.3.1.3).

In the last few decades, a number of new approaches to language learning and teaching have been developed which take account of context. Possibly the most notable of these is the 'communicative' approach (see, for example, Johnson and Morrow 1981). 'Communicative' language teaching (CLT) focuses on language use rather than language usage (Hymes 1972) and, unlike the 'Received Tradition', relies on functional/notional rather than Latinate analyses of language (Wilkins 1976). The dominance of CLT at a global level means that learners in many countries experience language and language learning very differently to their South African counterparts. The point of this thesis, then, is not to argue that learners do not need to know the structures and lexis of the language but rather that there are very different ways of understanding how language elements function and can be learned. The need to work with examiners and teachers as the new NSC examination is introduced therefore becomes imperative if old practices are not to be further entrenched.

As already noted, a goal of the DoE is to provide access to HE for twenty percent of the 18 to 24 year old section of the population by 2010, yet at school language is being approached (taught and examined) in a technical way and focuses on product, which excludes understanding and meaning-making. To reiterate, an "instrumentary" (Christie 1993: 88) model of language allows no significant engagement with

language as meaning; does not illuminate the study of meaning; and “can *never* enable the student to address the character or organization of the text” (Christie 1993: 89) [my emphasis]. The education system needs to adopt a rhetorical (that is, focusing on meaning making) approach to language teaching if the intention is to give learners access to tertiary education.

Another goal of the DoE is that entrants to HE show proven ability in cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). However, the discourses constructing the needs of ESL learners at HE level that hold that language is a set of rules to be learned and channel English language acquisition through specific genres (for example, the summary and comprehension), will not enable candidates to develop CALP because language is learned as part of situated practice; language proficiency is not control of the surface structures of English.

When learning involves basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), language is supported by a wide range of paralinguistic and situational cues. In other words, it is context-embedded (Cummins & Swain 1983). Since participants can actively negotiate meaning, this type of learning is cognitively undemanding. To achieve CALP, however, learners must be proficient in language to the extent that they are able to construct meaning using a reduced range of cues, primarily linguistic.

According to Cummins and Swain (1983), to develop CALP it is necessary to stretch one’s linguistic resources to the limit. During the process of developing CALP, some ‘subskills’ are mastered rapidly and others continue to develop throughout the school years, as would particularly be the case with ESL learners, who are not mother-tongue English speakers. Currently, the English curriculum is more context-reduced than context-embedded and thus cognitively demanding for ESL learners.

Schooling’s aim for HE is to develop students’ abilities to manipulate and interpret cognitively demanding, context-reduced text. However, developing CALP requires active, cognitive involvement. Therefore, ‘instruction’ needs to be embedded in meaningful communicative contexts involving situated practice. Because of the misperception of the generalizability of school-based language literacy practices to the workplace and to HE, SC candidates are hampered in acquiring these practices. This has profound implications for the way in which language is developed at school level in that the embedding of instruction in meaningful communicative contexts involving situated practice calls for a ‘language across the curriculum’ approach rather than an approach which delivers language instruction in the discrete packages of the language classroom. Outcomes-based education, with its focus on ‘learning by

doing' *within a context* (Spady 1994) lends itself to learning language as situated practice. Outcomes based education is most effective when a student learns a context (*ibid.*), which entails ensuring that the process of learning enables.

Since the state wishes to ensure that it will be protected against subsidizing university students who are unable to succeed because they have had inadequate preparation (Amoore *et al.* 2003), re-curriculating the NSC to approach language as situated, embedded practice would therefore appear to be a matter of some urgency. It is unfortunate that the NSC outcomes have been decided on since the research reported on in this thesis shows that there is a need to move beyond traditional approaches to language teaching and assessment. In many respects, however, the new NSC will be the 'child' of the SC since many of the people involved in setting and marking the old examination will be employed to do the same for the new. One of the contributions of this research, therefore, is to offer an analysis which can be used to inform practice in this area since the 'naming' of discourses is a step towards enabling those involved in sustaining them to choose to resist their pull.

It is concluded that intentionally or unintentionally, the dominant discourses influencing ESL learning and assessment act to position the ESL candidate as inadequate when in reality, through its discourses, the SC curriculum is disadvantaging and disempowering ESL candidates by pursuing traditional, context-independent approaches to language teaching thus preventing learners from gaining the particular levels of English language literacy necessary to access the work environment and HE. The SC examination thus acts as a gate keeper rather than fulfilling its intended functions.

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