

Clem Adelman, Ed.
**UTTERING, MUTTERING.
 COLLECTING, USING, AND REPORTING TALK
 FOR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH.**
 London: Grant McIntyre, 1981.
 237 pp. \$50.00.

This book of readings fills a conspicuous gap in the "new" sociology of education literature. Since the publication of **Knowledge and Control** in 1971, there have been few works to grapple with the ethnomethodological-phenomenological critique of the traditional approach in the sociology of education. Drawing on the insights of ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology, the "new directions" sought to ground topics such as academic performance, the study of curriculum, personal achievement and interaction, deviance, and the cognitive development of the child within linguistic interaction. The classroom was seen to be a fruitful arena within which to conduct such analyses, although Michael Young, et al., went on to develop their work in other areas.

Books such as George Psathas' **Everyday Language**, Aaron Cicourel's **The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice**, and Atkinson and Heritage's **Structures of Social Action** constituted important work in this area, but were suited much more for graduate courses, and did not focus specifically on the school. Peter Woods' **Pupil Strategies**, and Hugh Mehan's **Learning Lessons** are more useful for undergraduate courses in the area, yet they share the same faults exemplified in Adelman's book, and in particular the inadequate conception of the child as subject.

The articles in **Uttering, Muttering** cover a range of modern debate within the field, such as: the role and practice of ethnography; the analysis of discursive strategies within the classroom; the negotiation of meaning; uncovering situational orientations within language use; and how to do interviews within schools. The articles enable an analysis of how educational performance, linguistic ability, and competence are displayed through speech, rather than somehow existing innately in the student. The articles are in the main clearly written, and include such authors as Peter Woods, Paul Atkinson, Michael Stubbs, and Sara Miles.

The virtue of this small book is that it can be very easily adapted to an introductory course on either the sociology of education or the sociology of language. This feature of the book is also its limit, however, and must be kept in mind. There is a tendency in the articles to simplistically assume that through the analysis of talk we can uncover the real world of social relationships. This underlies the emphasis on 'emic' understanding, and the triangulation of interpretation. However, such an approach raises more questions of theory and method than it

resolves. It is no surprise, and thus disappointing, to see many of the traditional sociological myths transplanted into these new analyses. For example: that bias is a problem rather than an intimate feature of analysis; that the analyst can be immersed in the situation, and thus nonproblematically produce objective data; that the analyst can be immersed and critical; that students are schooled passively, and only exhibit self-reflection when they use strategies to outwit teachers; that talk always distorts interests, (without tackling how analytic talk is revelatory); and that the distortions of lay talk legitimate analytic misrepresentation and manipulation.

The idea of the work in this book is important, that situational features such as performance, authority, questioning and answering, and the character of knowledge are organized through and within language use. Yet by trading upon the above-mentioned sociological myths, the authors fall short of formulating a strong version of how language could be a medium of social organization. Language becomes another unexplicated sociological variable, instead of the social resource which enables and constrains the topicalization of language as worthy of enquiry.

The central fault lies in depicting language users as linguistic subjects, as rule-followers rather than as rule-users. The use of language is a creative resource for both the educational practices researchers research, and for the possibility of language analysis in the first place. It is not just ironic, but a theoretical mistake to undertake language analysis in a way which separates sociology from the social world. Language is both a topic and a resource, and it thus both enables and constrains all users.

Because of its educational orientation, this book is especially valuable for teachers, educators, and sociologists. It is an easy introduction to this new area of research, and does raise some interesting issues. I recommend this book as an introductory work in the area, but think that the above reservations both exemplify the original promise of the new directions, and show where still more work needs to be done.

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References

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