

識字の社会文化的実態

Literacy as Sociocultural Practice

ホサイン, タニア HOSSAIN, Tania

● 早稲田大学
Waseda University

 **Keywords** 識字の社会文化的側面, 識字の自律モデル, 識字の観念的モデル
sociocultural aspects of literacy, autonomous model of literacy, ideological model of literacy

ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the perspectives of literacy. The main focus of this paper would be the sociocultural practices of literacy. The first part of this paper will deal with the individual dimension of literacy which is termed as *autonomous model of literacy* by Street. The later half of the paper will deal with the sociocultural aspects of literacy. Sociocultural perspective primarily focuses on literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon which exists between people and connects individuals with different points of time. Street termed it *ideological model of literacy*. Ideological model of literacy contrasts with what the autonomous model of literacy. This paper will also focus on the oral and written languages. Paper ends with Gee's definition of literacy.

本論文では識字をいくつかの観点から考察する。中心論点として採り上げるのは、識字の社会文化的実態である。最初に、識字の個別的側面を取り上げる。ストリートはこれを「自律モデル」と名づけた。後半では、社会文化的側面について論じる。社会文化的側面の考察においては、同じ時代の人々の間に存在し、個人同士を結びつける、社会文化現象としての識字に力点が置かれる。ストリートはこれを識字の「観念的モデル」と呼んだ。観念的モデルは、自律モデルと対照をなすものである。本論文では口語と文語についても言及する。最後はジーによる識字の定義を紹介する。

Perspectives on literacy have changed dramatically over past years. Every new definition increased expectations of what it means to be literate. Until recently literacy was considered in a very simple way - the ability to read and write and mostly in the standard national language. But current practices are divided into two dimensions, “the individual dimensions” and “the social dimensions”(Green & Dixon, 1996, p. 292, quoted in Perez, 2004). A person’s ability to read and write is regarded as literacy from the individual dimensions. It is treated as a personal and mental attribute which is use for individual purposes and individual’s benefit (Ferdman, 1991, cited in Perez, 2004). Individual accomplishment of literacy is considered as a skill which is acquired by an individual, especially in an educational context by using oral language as a basis which ultimately affects cognitive development. From this aspect literacy actually depends on a description of skill level and it also examines the relationship between the oral and written language as well as between literacy and cognitive development. It basically focuses on the individual aspects rather than social context which is operated by the individuals. This view is termed by Street (1984) as an ‘autonomous model of literacy’ (McKay, 1996).

In contrast, sociocultural perspective primarily focuses on literacy as a social and cultural phenomenon which exists between people and connects individuals with different points of time. Street (1991) promotes such view and he calls it *ideological model of literacy* (McKay, 1996). Ideological model of literacy emphasizes the uses of the literacy practices and the meaning is related to the specific cultural contexts. He contrasts this model with what the autonomous model of literacy.

Social anthropologist Jack Goody’s autonomous model probably is one of the strongest versions of the ‘autonomous model of literacy’. Goody’s major conception of literacy is termed as “autonomous model” by Street (1984). Goody believes that

there is a difference between the literate and non-literate societies. He mentioned it because of the habitual qualities of the written word. According to Goody, writing is important in literacy. Writing is something which connects words to words. Like the language of oral communication, it is not connected with peculiarities of time and space. He describes the ways through which cultural heritage can be transmitted in the non-literate societies and then tried to explain how these ways can be changed by the adoption of the effective and easy means of written communication. In oral societies all beliefs and values are communicated among the individuals through the face-to-face communication and there are no materials such as cave painting or hand axe which contain the cultural traditions. From these differences Goody infers that cognitive skills and social achievements create two kinds of societies (Street, 1984).

Goody continued to base fundamental aspects of human reasoning on the distinction between oral and literate culture. In one of his essays, he mentioned, “The intrinsic nature of oral communication has a considerable effect upon both the content and the transmission of the cultural repertoire”(Goody, 1968, p. 29, quoted in Street, 1984). He says in the oral culture meanings of words are ratified according to the situations where they are used. But in the literate societies words gather ‘successive layers of historically validated meanings’ (ibid). He mentioned that in the oral society cultural repertoire held in the memory is subject to constant change and part of it is eliminated by the process of forgetting. He also mentioned, “the pastness of the past, then, depends upon a historical sensibility which can hardly begin to operate without permanent written records”(Goody, 1968, p. 53, quoted in Street, 1984).

Other researchers point to the difference between the oral and written language. According to Wells (1987), the difference between the oral and written language arises from the fact of conversation, which

is jointly constructed in a shared social context where a participant can predict the shared information. In contrast, a writer maintains a distance in time and space from the potential readers. But there may be various kinds of style in both spoken and written discourse which may vary in the prediction about audience involvement and the level of abstraction. Many other scholars like Wells gave an importance on the audience relationship between the oral and the written language (McKay, 1996).

Other researchers mentioned that the most striking differences between the written and the oral language is the performance of the written words which allows language to become an object of awareness. Olson (1990) points about literacy, “.....(L)iteracy turns language into an object of awareness...In the same way that language makes objects and events in the world objects of awareness, so literacy makes language an object of awareness (Quoted in McKay, 1996, p. 424). Olson describes literacy as an autonomous text by making language as an object of awareness and separating the speaker from his or her speech. He also describes it as an authorless text and the uniqueness of these texts is that there is no indication of this fact which is declared by the author (McKay, 1996).

Researchers who mentioned literacy as an individual skill not only focus on the written and the oral language but also examine the relationship between literacy and cognitive development. They argue that written word has intense impact on cognitive development. It transforms the mind and creates the ability to think independently and abstractly. Some argue that cognitive development is possible with the oral language and written language also has a greater importance on the cognitive development (ibid).

According to this view there are four levels of literacy. The performative level basically involves individual's ability to transfer a written message into speech in order to understand its meaning. The

functional level deals with the demands of everyday life that are expressed through written words. The informal level expresses the process through which written words express information. The epistemic level deals with the ability to transform knowledge and experience which is unavailable to those who are not literate (ibid).

One's ability to acquire certain level of literacy skill is not only a matter of achieving certain level of skill rather it provides social identity. In this way, the individual level of literacy affects the individual's role in the society. Literacy and illiteracy are the terms which provide one with social identity. According to the ideological model of literacy, there are some dangers of using these dichotomies. One may not be literate in English but may be highly literate in an other language. It is really harmful to say that the person is illiterate. It is feasible that a biliterate person may or may not be fluent in their second language. But it does not mean that the person is illiterate. Literacy in language does not necessarily mean oral fluency (ibid).

[A] focus on simple reading and writing skills as defining “literate” thinkers, and on uses of oral and written language as involving different intellectual dimensions, are unhelpful distinctions. Uses of oral and written language mix and blur and vary as the language situation changes, and these complexities need to be considered if we are to understand the literacy demands that occur within a technological culture (Langer: 1987, p. 4, quoted in McKay, 1996).

Street criticized two aspects of the autonomous model of literacy: the oral and written languages are very different and only literacy is related to the cognitive development. According to Street, in a specific cultural context oral and written language have some specific functions and there is an overlap and mix of communication. He mentioned that the

great divide between oral and written language has been exaggerated. The uses of the written language in some societies can be handled by the oral language in other societies. Street (1984) rejects the idea that literacy per se is meaningful to cognitive development. Street points out that the introduction of literacy is normally followed by new forms of social organization. Thus, the differences among the cognitive skills may not arise because of the literacy level but because of the new forms of social interaction which arise to foster literacy. So to Street the term literacy means the way though which the language is used and the development of the cognitive skills which is related to the social practices (McKay, 1996).

Social dimension of literacy treats literacy as a social practice and cultural phenomenon. Literacy defined a set of social activities which involve written language in terms of its function and context. It expresses the way in which people use literacy to achieve goals in a variety of sociocultural context (Cazden, 1988; Cook-Gumperz, 1986a; Gee, 1992, 2000; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, cited in Perez, 2004). In a sociocultural context, literacy does not just mean the multifaceted act of reading, writing and thinking but it also means to find out the constructive meaning from the printed text (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Erickson, 1984; Gee, 1992, 2000; Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 1995, cited in Perez, 2004). Sociocultural theory of literacy discusses and tries to find out the cultural context in which children have grown up and developed. It concerns how children interpret their relation with others, how children learn the process of interpretation and encode their world (Perez, 2004).

Socio-cultural approaches to literacy took some concepts of Vygotskian approach to development (Vygotsky 1987, Wertsch 1985) which emphasize the social world where learning and literacy emerged. The central belief of Vygotsky's theory was that more knowledgeable members of a group bring other

members into the cultural practice. According to Vygotsky, human thought is always governed by the cultural tools and also has its own social histories. Wertsch (1985) extends this notion and suggests how one came to know something cannot be separated from the cultural tools and it mediate and transform the very act of knowing (Perez, 2004). Shweder (1991) mentioned:

The idea of tools for thought is an apposite ... metaphor for thinking about thinking. It says that thinking is fundamentally interdependent with the traditional intellectual artifacts, representational schemes, and accumulated knowledge of some cultural or subcultural community. It says that ... the life of the mind becomes an extension or an analogue of, or an appendage to, culture artifacts and their built-in design features (Shweder 1991, p. 98, quoted in Gee, 1992, p. 38).

The child first came to know how to use these cultural tools in a social activity with others. This social activity has a shape which becomes a part of child's mental equipment. A child carries this mental equipment in her own head and brings it to the social activity. The child always bears the traces of the social site as origin and continual renewal. According to Vygotsky, child's mental functioning develops with cultural tools by experiencing with more skilled partners. The central belief of Vygotsky's theory was that the more knowledgeable members of a group engage in social intercession that brings other members of a society into the cultural practice. But the significance of the skilled partner is controversial. The crucial factor is that which partners would share in problem solving and would establish a common ground for interaction. Less skilled partners may provide the challenge while the skilled partner would provide the opposite (Gee, 1992).

Ferdman (1991) explains the relationship between

literacy and culture and point out that everyone holds an image of behaviors, beliefs, values and norms i.e. holds an image of a culture of the ethnic group in which he belong. And he termed it as cultural identity. He mentioned that for individuals as well as groups, it derives from the symbolic and practical significance of literacy. He said, “all literacy users are members of a defined culture in a cultural identity, and the degree to which they engage in learning or using literacy is a function of this cultural identity”(Ferdman, 1991, quoted in Perez, 2004, p.5). Literacy cannot be judged without context and content. It is always filtered through culture. Thus, making meaning of a text in one’s own terms is the central to any act of literacy and this meaning may or may not be the standard or official interpretations of writes agency. Literacy is situated socially and culturally. One grows, develops and learns by the interpretation and the interaction within one’s social culture and social group. The literacy users interpret and encode information about the world by their cultural identity (Ferdman, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995, quoted in Perez, 2004)

For example, Torres-Guzman (2004), in her article, *Language, Culture, and Literacy in Puerto Rican Communities*, point out how culture is embedded with the concept of literacy in Puerto Rican society. In Puerto Rican society, there is a mixture of Indian, European and African populations and as many Puerto Ricans lived on the mainland as on the island of Puerto Rico. In 2000 on the mainland, there were 1, 137,336 Puerto Rican school age children (less than 18 years old). The household income was less than \$ 25,000 in 61% of the cases and over one- third of the Puerto Rican children are living in poverty. When children enter in the classroom, they bring social value, cultural heritage of their families, experiences of the places where they live and resources of their community. This cultural knowledge may influence communication in the classroom. For example, Byers and Byers (Cited in Ogbu, 1991) point out

the difference between the eye contact between the teachers and the Puerto Rican children. It is the culture of the Puerto Rican children to look down to show respect to the teachers when they are being reprimanded. On the other hand, the teacher thought that it is impolite to look down when being chastised. Teachers expect them to look at them. So the politeness of the students is treated as rudeness by the teacher as the teacher does not know the cultural diversity of the student. This example of behavior reveals that a different world may give young learners a unique sense of what demonstrating competence means. A child looks at the outer world by the knowledge of the ethnic group. This changing way of making sense of the world is continuously present and there is a constant contention among the population where the child lived. Thus, it is visible that literacy is intrinsically related to culture (Perez, 2004).

Within a sociocultural context, the construction of literacy deals with the attempts which account for aim, purpose, audience, text and context through which reading and writing occur. Jerome Bruner, a constructivist psychologist, framed literacy in a socio-cultural constructive framework. According to Bruner’s (1996) constructivism tenet, the learners use their cultural tools, the symbols, texts and ways of thinking in an active process of meaning making and reality construction Thus, in the culture group one learns the way of interacting with the text, acquires the knowledge and skills with letters, words and also the organization of the text to interpret a written text. The construction of reality stands within cultural contexts where purpose and environment help to shape the meaning. For example, the meaning and the construction of literacy for food shopping may require the knowledge of the food, organization of food markets etc. On the other hand, the construction and the meaning of writing a letter will require some ability to handle writing instruments, the cultural form for letters etc (Perez, 2004).

Sociocultural constructivist's framework of literacy refuse the idea that literacy consists of decontextualized linguistic such as sounds of letters, knowledge of words etc. Sociocultural framework of literacy gives importance to the functional, constructivist and cultural view of literacy which is situated as a social practice. Literacy is related to the everyday life and maintained by talk, time and place. So, literacy not only means to read and write the symbols but also the ability to do so in a culturally appropriate manner. Thus, cognitive practice is not literacy but it is an interactive process. In this process talk plays an important role to define and negotiate meaning of a text in a sociocultural environment (Perez, 2004, p. 6).

The whole questions of cognitive development was changed by the work of Scribner and Cole (1981) who worked Vai people on Liberia in West Africa. Three kinds of literacy were exposed to Vai people. In school, they learn English, learn Arabic from the Holy Quran as they are led by the local Iman in morning prayers and they also learn the Vai script as it has been used in the community since 19th century. They found that in many tasks non-literates do better or as well as the literate people. The tasks in which the literate did better than the non-literates were the skills which were closely related to the skills which they had used to become literate such as language as a means of instruction in discussion of grammar etc. Cole also found that cognitive skills are enhanced by practicing specific scripts. For example people who are literate in Arabic and learn the language by memorizing Holy Koran do better at the time of memorization (McKay, 1996). Different sorts of mental effects can be raised by different kinds of social practices (Gee, 1992).

Within the definition of functional multiple literacies, literacy is a tool which is determined culturally and which is used for specific purposes. If the context and purpose of literacy change, specific elements of the environment are also altered and

therefore the person's ability to use literacy changes. So, the practice of literacy means culture- specific ways of knowing. Most people in the United States regardless of their educational background has some knowledge on literacy and also live in a society where various kinds of literacy is valued (Perez, 2004).

Sociocultural perspective of literacy expresses that these multiple literacies are tightly related within the discourse and social practices (Perez, 2004). Gee (1992) accepts this view and contends that literacy is integrated with and interwoven into wider practices that involve talk, interaction, values and beliefs (p.32). He argues that one can never learn simply by reading and writing but to read and write within certain Discourse or Discourses. Gee mentioned these practices as Discourses and he used capital D. According to Gee,

A Discourse is a socio-culturally distinctive and integrated way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking, and valuing connected with a particular society identity or role, with its own distinctive "props"(building, objects, spaces, schedules, books etc) (Gee, 1992, p. 33).

He mentioned literacy as plural as literacies. To him writing and reading are inseparable from Discourses such as social practice, cultures and subcultures etc. Thus, reading and writing are not private affairs which can be treated as a separate skill but rather social acts in which people engage within a community. For example, writing announcement to sell Vietnamese crafts does not depend only to the mastery of the language but also on the knowledge of the social contexts-what should be emphasized on the poster and where it should be posted. And to know such kind of social context, it is necessary to have interaction with the people who are already master in that discourse. In this way, it will be possible to know how to use a text in a particular social purpose (McKay, 1996).

To Gee a Discourse is an "identity kit" which

expresses the actions such as how to act, talk and sometimes write. It will reveal particular roles that others will recognize. It is not possible to master Discourse by overt instruction. Discourse can be acquired by enculturation through the interaction with those people who are already mastered in the Discourse (McKay, 1996, p. 428). This is the way through which native language and initial home-based discourses as well as public-oriented Discourses are acquired (Gee, 1992).

Other important factors that have impact in the socio-cultural approaches to literacy are the child's social class, socio-economic factors, parental education etc. For example, Research shows that a child's success in foreign language learning is related with the child's family background, social class, parental education etc. The actual knowledge of literacy is a by-product of socialization which is based on particular school-based literacy practices and their Discourses such as values, beliefs, ways of acting and interacting, reading, writing etc (ibid).

Thus, according to Gee (1992) sociocultural approaches to literacy express that thinking and speaking are the functions of the social group and also some of the specific Discourses. Literacy is one kind of social skill which makes people able to take functional part in one or more given social groups' Discourses. It is learned by guided participation and built on trust. A good part of knowledge does not belong to the mind of the people rather it depends on the practices of the social group in which they belong.

As Heath (1982) mentioned,

Literacy events must...be interpreted in relation to the *larger sociocultural patterns* which they may exemplify or reflect. For example, ethnography must describe literacy events in their sociocultural contexts, so we may come to understand how such patterns as time and space usage, care giving roles, and age

and sex segregation are independent with the types and features of literacy events a community develops. It is only on the basis of such thorough-going ethnography that further progress is possible towards understanding cross-cultural patterns of oral and written language (Heath: 1982, pp.74, quoted in Street, 1984)

Thus, overall in the socio-cultural approach to literacy, learning to read and learning to write are viewed as acts of knowing or multiple literacies which are situated within a given cultural and social context as well as discourse (Perez, 2004).

References

- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one Community*. London: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cazden, C. B. (1988). *Classroom discourses: The Language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cook-Gumperz, J. (1986a). Literacy and schooling: An unchanging equation? In J. Cook-Gumperz (Ed.), *The social construction of literacy* (pp. 16-44). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Erickson, F. (1984). School literacy, reasoning and civility: An anthropologist Perspective. *Review of Educational Research*, 54, 525-544.
- Ferdman, B. M. (1991). Literacy and cultural identity. In M. Minami & B. P. Kenedy (Eds.), *Language issues in literacy and bilingual/multicultural education* (pp. 347-390). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.
- Gee, J. (1992). Socio-cultural approaches to literacy (literacies). In W. Grabe (Ed.), *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 31-48). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gee, J. (2000). Discourse and sociocultural studies in reading. In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. III, pp.195-207). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Goody, J. (1968). *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Green, J. & Dixon, C. (1996). *Language of literacy dialogues: Facing the future or reproducing*

- the past. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 28, 290–301.
- Guzman, T.M. (2004). Language, Culture and Literacy in Puerto Rican Communities. In Perez, B. *Sociocultural Contexts of Language and Literacy*. Lawrence Erlbaum associates: Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Heath, S.B. (1982). "What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School", *Language in society*, Vol. 11.
- Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Langer, J. (1987). A sociocognitive perspective on Literacy. In J. Langer (Ed.), *Language, Literacy and culture: Issues of society and schooling* (pp.1–20). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- McKay, S.L. (1996). Literacy and literacies. In S.L. McKay & N.H. Hornberger (eds.), *Annual Review of applied linguistics* (pp. 421–445). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogbu, J.U. (1991). Cultural diversity and school experience. In C. E. Walsh (Ed.), *Literacy as praxis: Culture, language, and pedagogy* (pp. 25–50). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Olson, D. (1990). Contribution to the forum: When a learner attempts to become literate in a second language, what is he or she attempting? *TESL Talk*. 20 (1), 18–20.
- Perez, B. (2004). *Sociocultural Contexts of Language and Literacy*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other people's words: The cycle of low literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. (1981). *Narrative, literacy, and face in interethnic communication*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Scribner, S. and M. Cole. (1981). *The psychology of literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shweder, R.A. (1991). *Thinking through cultures: Expeditions in cultural psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. (1991). *Cross-cultural literacy*. Paper presented at the conference on International Literacy. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Street, B. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy development, Ethnography, and education*. London: Longman.
- Torres-Guzman. (2004). Language, Culture, and Literacy in Puerto Rican Communities. In Perez, B. (2004). *Sociocultural Contexts of Language and Literacy*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahwah, New Jersey.
- Vygotsky, L. (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1: Problems of general psychology, including the volume thinking and speech*. New York: Plenum. [Ed. R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton]
- Wells, B. (1987). Apprenticeship in literacy. *Interchange*, 18(1-2), 109–123. Wertsch, J.V. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J.V. (1998). *Mind as action*. Oxford, England: Oxford University press.