



TUTOR TIPS

Author of this Tip: Dr Ann Kelly, Lecturer, School of Education & Professional Studies, Griffith University

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Text Analysis

In a 1990 article that has proved to have been very influential, literacy researchers Peter Freebody and Allan Luke identified four roles they considered necessary for literacy learners to develop. These roles are:

- code breaker
- meaning maker
- text user
- text critic.

However, Freebody and Luke warned against seeing these roles as sequential. Rather, they were very definite about developing **all these roles in all students**.

Thus, not only should we be concerned about helping students with very limited literacy skills to acquire particular skills such as the decoding of words, but Freebody and Luke believed that such students should be given

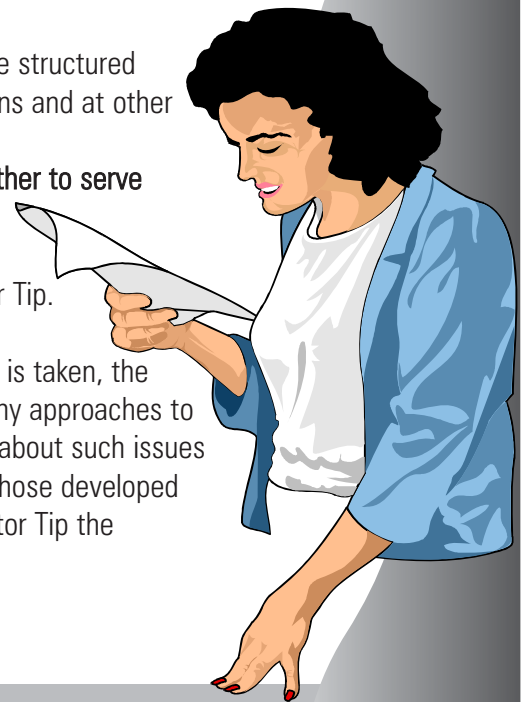
- an opportunity to learn how texts such as postcards, recipes, instructions were structured
- encouragement to read and write a range of texts both during teaching sessions and at other times (e.g. when traveling on a bus, waiting for an appointment)
- **training in developing skills to understand how the features of texts work together to serve range of purposes.**

It is this last area, often called discourse analysis, which is the focus of this Tutor Tip.

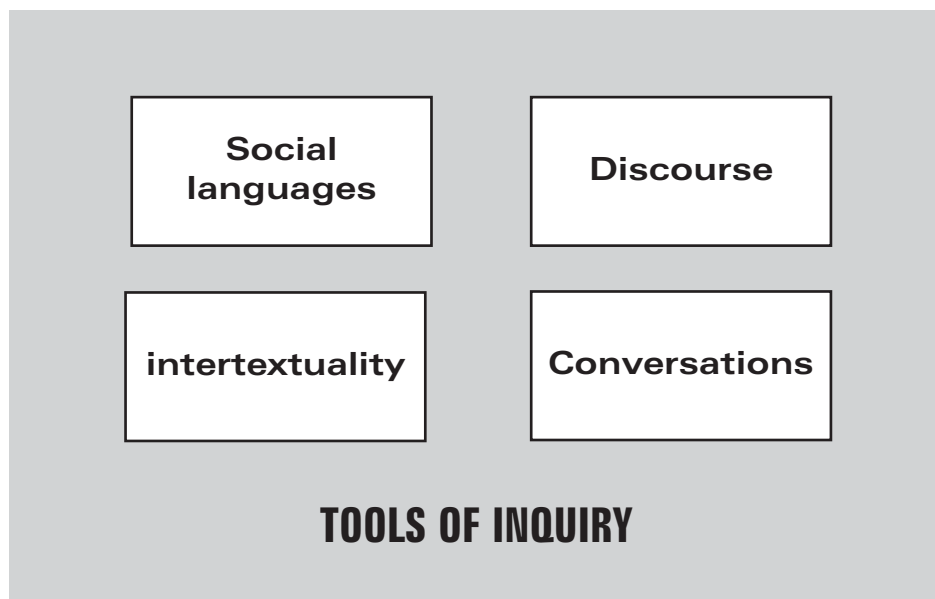
Any text can be analysed and what is revealed will depend on the approach that is taken, the specific features of the text, and obviously the skill of the analyst. There are many approaches to text analysis: some, such as that adopted by Norman Fairclough, are concerned about such issues as power relations that are evident in the text, while other approaches such as those developed by Michael Halliday and his colleagues focus more at the clause level. In this Tutor Tip the analytical method of James Gee (2005) is used.

Gee describes his approach in the following way:

The approach to discourse analysis ... seeks to balance talk about the mind, talk about the interaction and activities, and talk about society and institutions more than is the case in some other approaches (p. 5)



Gee has developed a two-dimensional framework for his analytical method. On one axis might be placed his four "Tools of Inquiry".



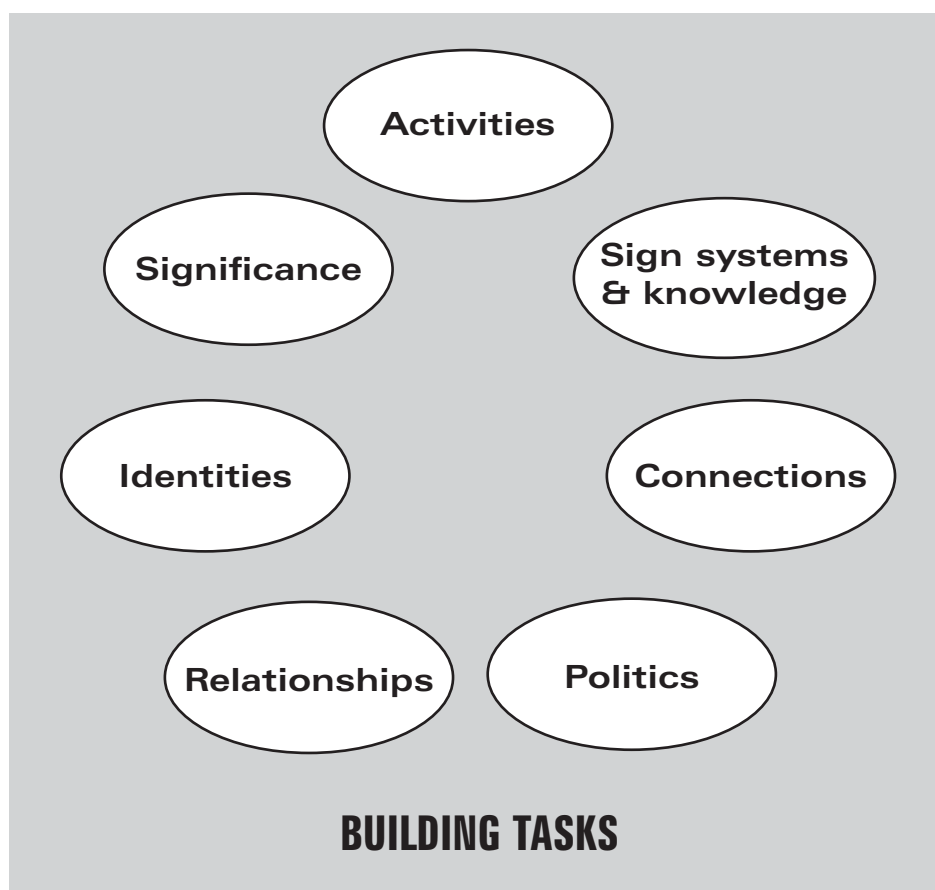
Social languages are the different languages that we use across a range of settings. For example, the language we use in an interview will be somewhat different from what we use when having coffee with friends.

Discourses are 'ways of being' in the world. Not only do we adjust our language to meet the requirements of particular settings but we also need to be conscious of our dress, values, etc.

Intertextuality refers to how one text relates to others.

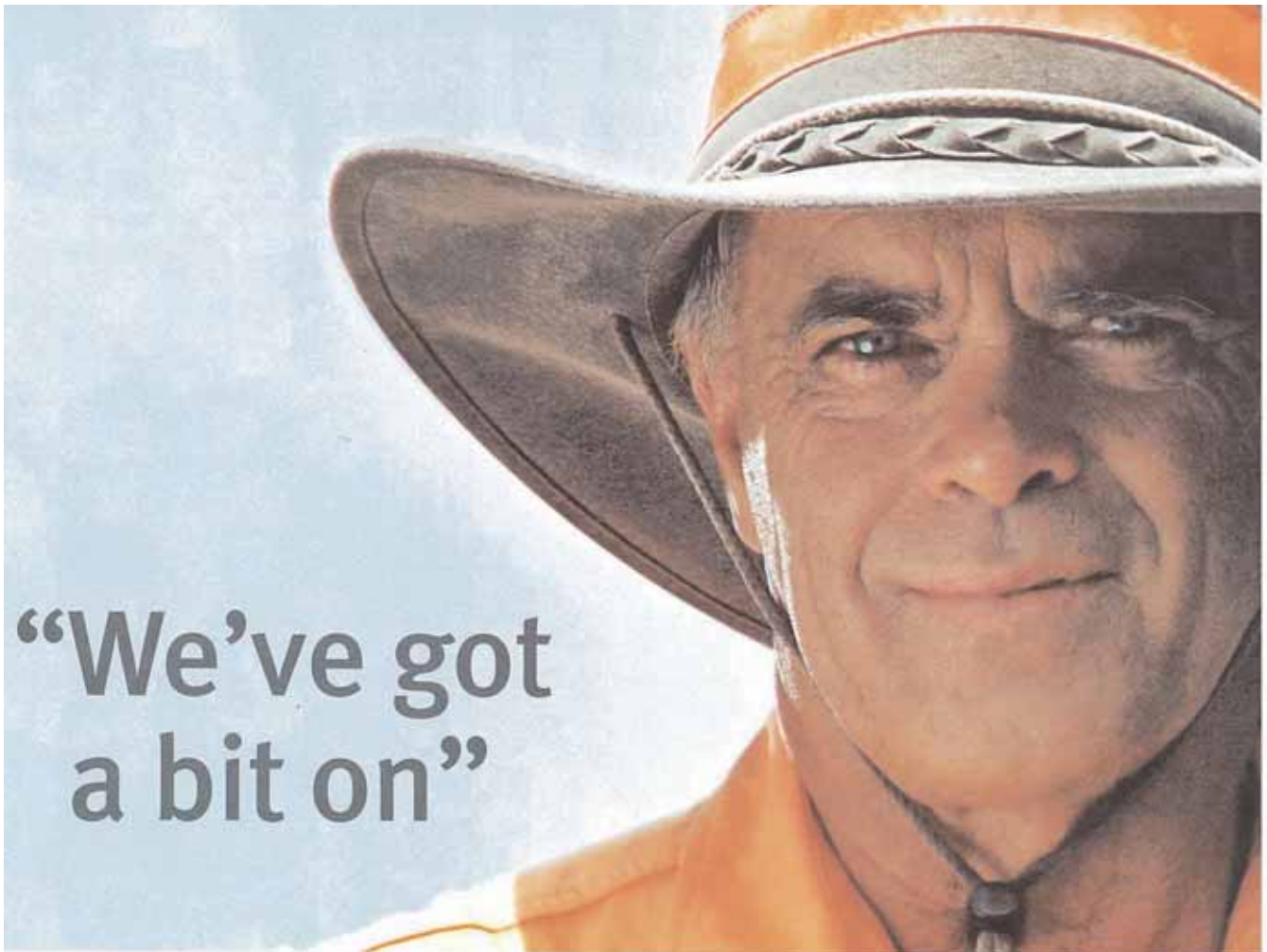
Conversations for Gee are closer to what we might think of as 'issues'.

On a second axis might be placed Gee's seven "Building tasks". These are:



Gee suggests that analysts or, indeed, teachers and tutors, may start with any of these building tasks.

Main Roads Advertisement



“We’ve got
a bit on”

We’re spending over 13 billion dollars on roads in the next five years, so we’re pretty busy.

We put out a whole heap of safety measures to warn you of the hazards ahead at roadworks. Not only to protect road workers but for your safety too.

With all this work ahead, there are going to be more roadwork delays. We know that these seem to be a nuisance, but by following our signs and instructions we can work together to help you get where you want to go on time.

Here are some tips on how to avoid frustrating situations around roadworks:

- think about changing your route or have a look at public transport options
- listen out for radio updates
- check your local newspaper or our website for updated info
- change the way you drive to suit the conditions
- keep an eye out for us and follow our signs and instructions
- be sure to allow an extra five to ten minutes travel time

And remember you can’t control the traffic conditions, only your reaction to them.

For more information on web camera, traffic and road information visit www.mainroads.qld.gov.au

Safety around roadworks. It’s a two-way street.

Main Roads – Connecting Queensland



A. The image and the accompanying statement in the Main Roads advertisement, perhaps the first feature that is noticeable, is the image of the worker. Gee's Building Tasks of 'significance' and 'identity' might be a good place to start in analysing this component of the advertisement.

1. What is the significance of this image?

The worker's image is significant

- in terms of the layout of the advertisement as his face and neck are taking up over half the height and half the width of the advertisement;
- because it represents the physical presence of the Main Roads. It might be the person who stops us on the highway.

2. What sort of Main Roads identity is being portrayed by this image?

- It represents the Main Roads in the form of a worker: not an executive or professional but a real worker whom we all see actually on roads that are under construction. This deduction is supported by the fact that he is wearing a broad-brimmed hat, work clothes and his skin appears to be a bit lined.

3. What is the significance of the statement?

- It is direct speech.
- It is informal: shown through the use of the verb 'got' and 'a bit on' - colloquial expressions.
- Through the use of the pronoun 'we', he is representing the Main Roads.
- This statement serves as a topic for the text underneath.

B. The text under the statement and image In analyzing this text, we could consider Gee's Building Tasks categories of activities and connections.

1. What activities are the foci of the text?

- The Main Roads is spending lots of money (taxpayers' money).
- Safety 'measures' (presumably signs and instructions) are being applied as warnings.
- Drivers and the Main Roads will be collaborating to ensure the safety of both drivers and workers and to limit delays for drivers.
- A list of recommendations for driver action is given.

2. What connections are made across the texts?

- The topic statement next to the photograph focusing on activity is repeated in the second clause of the first sentence of the text underneath.

- The idea of safety is a major focus of this text. It is in the second, third and, fourth and fifth paragraphs. It also is featured in large print in the first part of the text in the box at the bottom of the advertisement,

Gee's notion of connections also links to his Tool of Inquiry intertextuality. Thus:

3. What connections are there in this text to other texts outside of this one?

- There's a connection made to signs on the roads and verbal instructions given by roadworkers that drivers are expected to obey.
- There is also a connection made between the list of instructions in the right-hand column of the text and using maps, public transport information (e.g. timetables), radio and website updates, and newspaper notices.

Another way of considering the text is through Gee's Tool of Inquiry 'conversation'. Roadworks are situated within a broader issue of global warming and the use of oil to power our cars. Should the taxpayers be funding so much roadwork or, rather, should we be putting our money into 'cleaner' modes of transport?

C. The text in the box

Gee's category of relationships might be one way to analyse this text, e.g. .

1. What relationships are being built through this text?

- What is very strong in this text and, indeed, across the whole advertisement is the emphasis on collaboration. Here we have the cliché 'It's a two-way street' but there is also a link across to the third paragraph in the text above to 'we can work together'.

The Building Tasks and Tools of Inquiry that I have been applied to this text reflect my own choices. However, it is almost a certainty that another analysis of this text by someone else will involve other combinations of both Building Tasks and Tools of Inquiry and the depth of such analyses will vary according to purpose of the activity.

References:

- Freebody, P., & Luke, A. (1990). Literacies programs: Debates and demands in cultural context. *Prospect: Australian Journal of TESOL*, 5(7), 7-16.
- Gee, J. P. (2005). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

REMEMBER! THESE ARE FLEXIBLE TOOLS TO HELP US SEE HOW TEXTS ARE USED TO PERFORM CERTAIN WORK.