

**1996: WHY WE STILL NEED  
CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Volosinov says that

the *inner dialectic quality* of the sign comes out fully in the open in times of social crises or revolutionary changes. In the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign cannot emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established, dominant ideology is always somewhat reactionary and tries, as it were, to stabilize the preceding factor in the dialectical flux of the social generative process, so accentuating yesterday's truth as to make it appear today's (1973 :24, italics in the original).

South Africa, in the period in which this research was undertaken, was in just such a period of crisis and revolutionary social upheaval. Critical de-construction is easier when the sign is unstable and the contest over meaning is out in the open. It was easy to demonstrate the need for critical literacy during the apartheid era. Critical analysis is more difficult and its necessity is less apparent in times of reconstruction and stability, in times when ideology is naturalised and the struggle over the sign is less obvious. However, no society is free of oppressive relations of power. Now the challenge for Critical Language Awareness is to prove its continuing usefulness in a post-apartheid South Africa (Janks, 1995: 413).

This is the conclusion to my thesis (Janks, 1995) on the research and development of *The Critical Language Awareness Series* (Janks, 1993) which was published prior to the first democratic election in South Africa. This conclusion recognises the many questions that

have been raised from a range of different positions about the value of CLA in a period of new hope and transformation.

Arguing from a humanistic perspective, Esterhuysen (1994), who claims that he used a CLA approach as a writer of the textbook series *Ruimland* (56), maintains that

There are several reasons why a powerful approach like CLA should be used with some caution in the present South African social and educational climate (56).

One of the reasons he gives is that

In these turbulent times care should be taken not to agitate the already inflamed national psyche any further.

Used in a loveless and cynical way, CLA could contribute to a classroom mentality that sees a conspiracy in every word and a trap in every text (57).

Esterhuysen with biting wit even dubs CLA, 'Cynical Language Abuse' (57). His article published in 1994 may well have been written earlier than this date and there is no way of knowing whether the historical context is now sufficiently different for him to have changed his position or not. I would argue that there is enough in his paper to constitute the 'challenge' to which I referred earlier.

Esterhuysen is not alone. Young (1993) writes from a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) perspective. In a review, which in sum recommends *The Critical Language Awareness Series* as 'a highly significant contribution to language teaching' (68), Young nevertheless criticises these materials for 'the deterministically negative view of the texts presented for deconstruction' (68) and for the selection of media texts that are only 'conspiratorial' (68). In the same paragraph he also notes that 'the struggle against apartheid is the glue that binds much of the oppositional stance of these texts' (68).

Granville, herself the writer of *Language in the News* in *The Critical Language Awareness Series*, also wonders about how CLA in post-apartheid South Africa might need to change.

When I started to think about this [Masters research] project the challenge was relatively straight forward: the enemy was apartheid and I could play the part as a 'subversive' teacher by encouraging my students to resist print and in so doing resist oppression. Now something different may be called for (Granville, 1995).<sup>1</sup>

This paper is an attempt to show that despite the radical changes that have taken place in our country, there is still a need for Critical Language Awareness. In doing so I hope to show that CLA is not a cynical enterprise but can contribute to a process of reconstruction and development.

CLA is an approach to language teaching based on a critical theory of language and on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) both of which see the use of language as a form of social practice. This it shares with CLT and Australian genre-based approaches. However, for CLA and genre theories, but not for CLT, all social practices are embedded in specific historical contexts where existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. Fairclough's (1989) model for CDA consists of boxes embedded one within the other. These boxes, one for each of the different dimensions of discourse - the text as a material object, the processes of production and reception of the text and the socio-historical conditions which govern these processes each require a different dimension of discourse analysis - text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation) (Fairclough 1995: 98; see Figure 1).

The embedding of the boxes emphasises the interdependence of these dimensions and the intricate moving backwards and forwards between the different types of analysis which this interdependence necessitates. Because these different forms of analysis are mutually dependent, it is possible to use any one as an entry point to CDA and problematic to use one in isolation from the others.

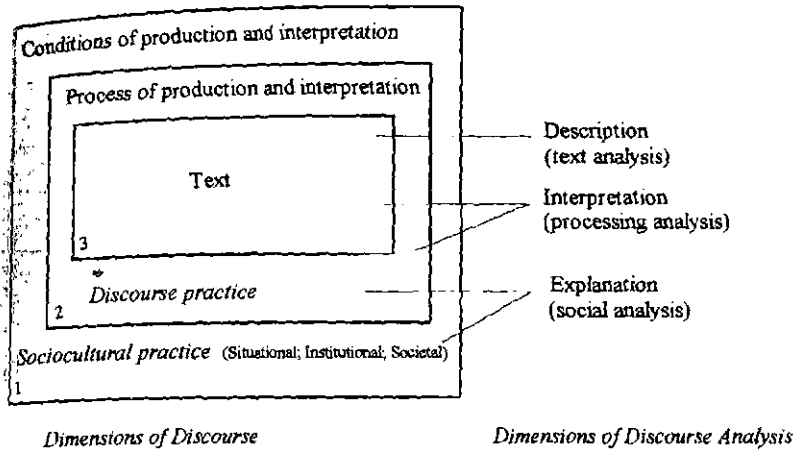


Figure 1: Fairclough's Dimension of Discourse and Discourse Analysis

In order to mount an argument for the continued need for CLA in South African schools I will begin with an analysis of a text. This analysis will be used to establish hypotheses about the discourses currently at work in South African society. Finally I will consider the possibilities created by such analysis for classroom practice. The text that I will focus on is an advertisement for the Standard Bank's *Domestic Promise Plan* which appeared in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* in 1994. (See Figure 2)

Fairclough's model shows that CDA is multi-faceted. In writing it is not possible to present the facets simultaneously as it is in a visual text (see Figure 1). The syntax of language is sequential with one idea coming after and/or before another. One has to select a place to begin, an entry point. It is, however, important to stress that the chosen entry point provides only one lens through which to consider the data and that the other lenses are essential to provide other

Figure 2



Sometimes I stare out the window while baby Jay is sleeping and I wonder where I'll be sleeping when I'm too old to work.

At least I know it will be somewhere comfortable. Ever since Mrs Lambert spoke to me, she showed me this Domestic Promise Plan. Something or other about a retirement policy. She told me she was putting R30 into it each month for me.

But what happens when Jay doesn't need me anymore?

I know what to do when the baby has a cough. And I know how to prepare a meal for twelve. But I don't know what happens to me when I'm old.

She smiled and said the policy could be taken out over 10, 15 or 20 years and I could even take it with me to my next job.

So stop worrying she said. It's all been taken care of.

I turned back to the window. And for the very first time I could see a lot further than my abby 6th birthday.

Why not give your Domestic peace of mind about retirement? Call 0800 12 4444 toll-free today.

Underwritten by **CREMTEHLIB**



With us you can go so much further.

For the moment I will begin with the box that I have numbered 3 - the text and pictures textual analysis. It is important however to stress that it is never possible to read meaning directly off the verbal and visual textual signs. This is well illustrated by reference to this particular text. Here the narrator, presumably the woman in the visual text who is named as a 'domestic' in the linguistic text, is wondering what will happen to her when she is old and the baby, baby Jay, does not need her anymore. Whose baby is baby Jay? South Africans familiar with the discourse of 'maids and madams' (Cock, 1980; and the cartoon strip *Madam and Eve*) are likely to assume that the baby is the employer's baby whom the domestic worker is employed to care for. Such an assumption would account for the worker's fear that when the baby no longer needs her she will be out of work. Many Australian readers that I have worked with, drawing this interpretation from the discourse of aging and women's fears of not being needed once the children have grown up, assume that the worker is thinking about her own baby. The different discourses available for readers to draw on provide different conditions for the reception of this text in these two different contexts (Fairclough's box 1). Without reference to the context of production and reception (Fairclough's box 2) it is not possible to favour either of these readings on the basis of close textual analysis alone. This is not to say that some textual features, the baby's name, visual clues such as what the domestic worker is wearing while baby Jay is sleeping, used in conjunction with contextual knowledge, cannot be used as evidence to support one or other of these interpretations. Recognising the limitations of textual analysis, I will use the text box as a heuristic device, a place to begin. Towards the end of the paper I will consider a different possible entry point.

The Standard Bank advertisement for its *Domestic Promise Plan* includes a visual text depicting a domestic worker dressed in what could be an overall and doek staring pensively out of an open window, her face lit by the light from the window. The pensiveness is evoked by the position of her hand cupping her chin in the pose associated with Rodin's 'penseur'. The burglar bars on the window are suggestive of imprisonment but they are also shaped in the form of a cross. The cross could be seen to reinforce the suggestion of suffering created by the bars and to underscore the sense of hope created by the light which comes from outside. This hope is lexicalised as a 'promise' in the form of

a retirement scheme for domestic workers. This link is established visually by the blue tints of the picture and the use of royal blue to surround the logo and the words 'Standard Bank', placed centrally at the bottom of the advertisement. The full blue of the logo compared with the muted blue tints in the picture creates a shift from uncertainty to certainty as one moves from the picture to the bank and its promise. In semiotic terms the logo has a higher modality (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1990: 51). These colours are not captured in the black and white reproduction of the advertisement in Figure 2.

There are other important aspects of the visual text. The woman in the text is not looking at the viewer. The picture therefore 'does not demand that the viewer enter into an imaginary social relation' with the woman (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1990:28). Instead she is presented as an object for the viewer's contemplation (28). The shot is a close-up which suggests the viewer's intimate knowledge of the woman. This is supported by the narrativised linguistic text which enables the viewer/reader to intrude on the woman's thoughts.

The composition of the overall text (including both visual and verbal signs) has interesting features on both its vertical (top-down) and horizontal (left-right) axes. On the vertical axis the text is divided into two parts. The top part, in which the picture of the woman occupies half of the overall text, dominates. The soft tints, the pensive pose, and the fact that from a Western left-right orientation the woman seems to be looking backwards, create uncertainty in semiotic terms.

The woman's hand, which cups the lit half of her face, divides the top half of the page down the middle on the horizontal axis. The hand leads the viewer's eye down to the column of linguistic text immediately below it. This column is different from the other two columns of print on either side of it: it appears in a shaded box; it has a different type-face and a larger font; there is larger spacing between the lines; the Standard Bank logo, the name of the policy and a slogan are placed centrally below this column. The force of this focusing directs the eye from the picture to this column of print, thus setting up a preferred reading path.

This pull to the middle column of print is offset by a tendency to start with the left hand column of print because of the left-right reading orientation developed as a habit of Western literacy. Which of these pulls is stronger would I suspect be influenced by one's purpose for reading. If one were reading closely in order to do a textual analysis one would be more likely to begin on the left with the first column. If one were flipping through the newspaper, not really intending to read the advertisement at all, the middle column might be more likely to catch the eye. 2

In the middle column the verbal text sets up a dichotomy between knowing and not knowing, reinforcing questions relating to the woman's uncertainty or certainty raised in the visual text. The first paragraph is structured around what 'I' knows and the second states what 'I' does not know. This pattern of certainty and uncertainty is reinforced by the organisation of the columns on either side of the shaded central block. To the left we are mainly (but not exclusively) presented with the domestic worker's uncertainty, 'I wonder where I'll be sleeping when I am too old to work', 'Something or other about a retirement policy', 'But what happens to me when Jay doesn't need me anymore?'. To the right we are told why the worker can 'stop worrying'; how because everything has 'been taken care of' she can say 'I turned back to the window. And for the very first time I could see a lot further than my sixty-fifth birthday'. The patterns of certainty and uncertainty are also not distributed equally among the participants: the worker, the employer, the baby and the bank. The employer and the bank have certainty, the worker does not, and the baby asleep is neither certain nor uncertain. The employee's uncertainty is such that 'peace of mind about retirement' is something that an employer is able to 'give' to a worker.

If one starts with the middle column, the reader is left to work out who 'I' is from the weight of the visual text and the rules of deixis whereby 'I' is the woman in the picture. This reading is confirmed by the column of print on the left where 'I' is said to 'stare out of the window'. With either reading path, the use of the first person narrative is firmly established. This works to humanise the domestic worker as a subject and a potential agent. She is a person with worries about her old age. It also suggests that domestic



workers who can identify with this narrative are the likely addressees for this text. The last sentence 'Why not give your domestic peace of mind' therefore constitutes an unexpected switch of addressee to the employer. But the 'you' does not have a stable referencing function. In the slogan 'with us you can go so much further' the 'you' seems to suggest the beneficiary of the Standard Bank's services, in this instance the worker. This text's ambivalence in relation to the addressee is significant, and seems to reflect an uncertainty with regard to the changing position of 'domestics'. These shifts manifest as discursive shifts from a paternalistic discourse of 'domestics' as servants who need to be cared for, to a liberal discourse of workers as independent human beings with needs, and possibly to a labour discourse of workers' rights.

While the use of personal narrative moves against the de-humanising and othering discourse of apartheid racism the construction of the woman as an object of our gaze in the visual text does not. Neither does the pattern of lexicalisation. The employer, Mrs Lambert, and the baby, Jay, are both named. Only the domestic worker is not dignified with a name. This indignity is compounded by the failure even to nominalise her. Her status as a worker is reduced to an attribute - domestic (attribute) worker (nominal) is thus reduced to 'domestic'. If she is a domestic worker, then Mrs Lambert is a domestic employer, but she is not lexicalised by either her attribute 'domestic' or by her status, 'employer'. The advertisers avoid the earlier lexicalisations of 'girl', 'servant' and 'maid' and capitalise on liberal reconstructions. But they stop short of labour discourse. The selection of 'domestic' as a nominal seems to be a reduction of 'domestic worker' the lexicalisation used by the Domestic Workers' Union.

The hybridity of the text is what provides evidence for values in transition. It shows the tenacity of existing discourses at work in society and the struggle of the alternative discourses to emerge. Textual instantiations capture the clash of discourses and demonstrate ideological forces at work to produce a different hegemony.

It is easy to show the power of the racist discourse of paternalism if one does a transitivity analysis of this text. In his *Introduction to Functional Grammar* Halliday (1985) explains transitivity as follows.

A fundamental property of language is that it enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them. ... Our most powerful conception of reality is that it consists of 'goings-on': of doing, happening, feeling, being. These goings on are sorted out in the semantic system of the language, and expressed through the grammar of the clause (101).

Amongst other things the clause evolved to express the

reflective, experiential aspects of meaning. This ... is the system of TRANSITIVITY. Transitivity specifies the different types of processes that are recognised in the language and the structures by which they are expressed (101).

His grammar proposes six different processes or kinds of transitivity (See Figure 3)

Figure 3

The system of transitivity in the clause: Summary of types of processes with examples.

<p><i>Types of doing</i> <b>Material processes: actor + goal</b> doing - eg. Parents sometimes hit children. (active voice) doing to - eg. Small babies should not be hit. (passive voice) creating - eg. The investigator does not have to make inferences.</p> <p><i>Saying</i> <b>Verbal processes: sayer + what is said + (receiver)</b> eg. One of the workers suggested that I try some shebeen brew</p> <p><i>Sensing</i> <b>Mental processes: Senser + phenomenon</b> Feeling - egs. I like that one. The children feel angry. Thinking - think, know, understand, interpret etc. Perceiving - Saw, noticed, stared at etc.</p> <p><i>Types of being</i> <b>Relational processes</b> being - x is y           eg. Child abuse is terrible (or a terrible thing). having - x has y       eg This child has a dog.</p> <p><i>Types of behaving</i> - <b>Behavioural processes</b> physiological - breathe, dream, sleep psychological - smile, laugh,</p> <p><i>Things that exist or happen</i> <b>Existential processes</b> egs. The world is round. There was a man at the door.</p>
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To do a transitivity analysis it is necessary to identify every verb and its associated process. It is then necessary to identify patterns in the use of these processes. So Luke (1988) in analysing early readers notices a pattern in which the child characters Dick and Jane are given only material and verbal processes. From this he concludes that children are represented as only allowed to do and say; they are not allowed to think (mental processes) and be (relational processes).

Figure 4 provides a transitivity table for the Standard Bank's *Domestic Promise Plan* advertisement showing transitivity arranged according to three participants.

Figure 4

<i>Mrs Lambert</i> Activity	<i>Mrs Lambert</i> Process	<i>The domestic</i> Activity	<i>The domestic</i> Process	<i>Baby Jay</i> Activity	<i>Baby Jay</i> Process
spoke	verbal	stare	mental	is sleeping	behavioural
showed	material	wonder	mental	does not need	mental
told	verbal	will be sleeping	behavioural	has	relational
was putting	material	am	relational		
smiled	behavioural	know	mental		
said	verbal	could take	material (but only with permission)		
said	verbal	worrying	mental		
taken care of	material	turned	material		
give	material	could see	mental		
call	verbal	know	mental		
		know	mental		
		to prepare	material		
		don't know	mental		
		am	relational		

What is interesting here is not that (like Dick and Jane), Mrs Lambert is constructed with predominantly material and verbal processes and the domestic worker with largely mental and relational processes. There is nothing intrinsically superior or inferior about material, mental, verbal or relational processes. In this context, however, constructing the domestic worker with

few material processes suggests that she is unable to act except with the permission or in the service of her employer. It is as if agency is granted her by her employer. What is much more interesting is the patterned alignment between the domestic worker and the baby. They are the only participants whose processes are mental, behavioural and relational. Thus in the transitivity structure one can see the domestic worker constructed as a baby who needs to be 'taken care of'. The transitivity structure encodes the infantilisation of human subjects which is the result of paternalism.

How does this pattern of transitivity happen? Should we imagine advertising copy-writers deliberately working out a careful alignment between the transitivity processes selected for the adult worker and for the baby in her care? CDA which requires that we consider the social conditions which affect textual production can suggest a fruitful line of enquiry. It leads me to hypothesise that the discourse of paternalism/infantilisation continues to exist in South Africa as a resource that is available for text producers to draw on when they write. 'Draw on' suggests conscious volition or deliberate choice. This may in fact be the case - one in which the advertisement writers choose to use a racist/paternalistic discourse. Using a Foucauldian perspective, I would argue that as members of a society we are constituted in and by the available discourses and that they speak through us - it is as if the discourse of racist/paternalism chooses the advertisement writers. I base this argument on the transitivity analysis. Transitivity is not as easily visible to producers and readers as other linguistic features because of the complexity of its encoding. Lexical selection in the verb has to be related to syntactic extensions, to participants and to processes. In addition one has to trace the patterns of use across participants. Deconstructive analysis of transitivity is a layered and complex process. It is not something that one can 'see' or 'feel' by just looking carefully at a text. I would argue that because transitivity is less obvious, deeper in the syntax, it suggests less conscious control by the writer and it requires more conscious effort for the reader to analyse it.

Examples of more obvious linguistic selections that are easier to recognise and monitor include the way in which the participants are named, which was discussed earlier and the use of the

passive construction. In 'It's all been taken care of', the deleted agent is presumably the employer who acts on behalf of her employee without her full consent or understanding, the latter shown by 'Something or other about a retirement policy'. This worker, constructed as unable to take care of herself is elsewhere in the text shown as capable of performing highly complex and responsible tasks (looking after the employer's sick child and preparing a meal for twelve people). Here one might wish to argue that the advertiser needs to construct the domestic worker as having no agency in order to ensure that the employer, who is more likely to accept that individuals (rather than the state) have to take responsibility for their financial security, the basic premise on which the insurance industry is based, will buy such a policy on behalf of her employee.

What remains is for me to explain how such an analysis can be used to show that we still need CLA in 1996. Critical Language Awareness is an application of CDA, and theory about the relationship between language and power, in educational settings. My analysis so far has led me to the following hypotheses

- 1 The discourse of paternalism continues in a post-election South Africa.
- 2 Conflicting discourses appear simultaneously in texts.

Both of these hypotheses provide useful lines of classroom enquiry. The first suggests that we, as teachers and students, could look for other data to confirm or disconfirm this hypothesis. Here CDA could begin, not with specific texts but with a hypothesis about one of the social conditions that may govern the construction of other South African texts. Our point of entry to such an analysis would be Fairclough's outer box and the hypothesis would govern the search for relevant data. Our own practices could then be included in this data. How do we treat the employees that work for us? How do we speak to the workers at school, the cashiers in supermarkets, domestic workers in our own homes and in the homes of our friends, workers at our own or our parents' places of work? Can we see ourselves using or resisting the discourses available to us? Analysing other people's discourse is not a sufficient means of achieving

agency in relation to our own discursive practices. Changing ourselves can contribute to changing society.

The second hypothesis perhaps needs further exemplification. The whole advertisement constructs retirement policies and relatedly the provision of pensions within a discourse of employer goodwill and not within a discourse of workers' rights. The new labour statutes, notably the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 3 of 1981 extended to domestic workers in 1994, provide domestic workers with some protection against unfair labour practices for the first time. It requires contracts, lays down the number of hours that an employee can be expected to work and it legislates for overtime pay. What is not included are a minimum wage and conditions of service. That there is no legislated right to a pension from one's employer is what is relevant to the discussion in this paper. Although the discourse of goodwill ties the advertisement to a discourse of paternalism what is new is the idea that domestic workers should have improved conditions of service. There were no equivalent advertisements in the 1980s; financial security for domestic workers in their old age was not yet on the social agenda<sup>3</sup>. This notion of provision is possibly a first step in the direction of entitlement and is certainly an idea around which a union could mobilise its members.

This advertisement shows an awareness on the part of the Standard Bank that there is now a whole new market for its policies which could not previously be tapped. There is a great deal of intertextual similarity between the advertisement under discussion and the bank's brochure for this *Domestic Promise Plan* (still available from the bank on request in 1996). The visual text of the women is repeated, but this time the shot is less close up, she is facing to the right and the burglar bars are extended no longer forming a cross. Her youth and the possibility of 'promise' are established by comparison with the visual in extreme close up of a much older man holding his or her face with both hands, symbolic of hopeless despair, on the front cover of the brochure. In the brochure there is no ambiguity about the addressee; it is unequivocally the employer as can be seen from the following quotations from the brochure.

How often do we consider that the unemployment benefits, medical aid and pension schemes which we take for granted from our employers are not available to our domestic staff? (page 3).

Your employee will become the sole owner of his/her *Domestic Promise Plan* (page 5).

Why not give your employee peace of mind about retirement? Simply complete the attached application form and mail it in the envelope provided (page 8).

In the brochure there is a great deal of hybridity in the lexicalisation. Workers are referred to as 'domestic staff', 'your employee', 'your domestic', 'maid', 'gardener'. Most references are to the reader as an 'employer' and to domestic staff as 'employees'.

That this new market for insurance policies is tied to changes in the socio-historical context is made explicit by a six page section in the brochure (as many pages as for information on the policy itself) which

gives an overview of the new legislation applying to your domestic employees - formulated for your interest (page 9).

This includes information about salaries and wages, hours of work, meal intervals, annual leave, sick leave, overtime, Sunday work, public holidays, termination of employment and what you as an employer need to do ( pages 10-14). Buying your worker a *Domestic Promise Plan* is thus textually linked to new conditions of service for domestic workers and to post-apartheid labour conditions. In case this alienates prospective policy purchasers, the Standard Bank distances itself from this legislation and undercuts it in the closing sentence of the brochure.

For now the most important thing is not to *over-react*. Good working relationships, founded on fairness and honesty, will endure in spite of legislation (page 14).



It simultaneously promotes and undercuts this legislation; it tries to position itself in contradictory positions. This accounts for the other signs of textual hybridity. This hybridity provides interesting insights to a society in transition and is an exciting way for students to understand discourse.

To my first two hypotheses I will now add a third.

- 3 Of the many different discourses available in the society to be drawn from, different texts privilege different ones.

The privileging of discourses works to serve particular interests. In South Africa there are several discourses of aging. In many African communities old people are respected and valued, the extended family system provides young people with a measure of security for their old age (albeit tied to a system of patriarchal rights and obligations). This is not to suggest that people who work should not have financial rights on retirement. It does however raise questions about whether a domestic worker is likely to stand at the window worrying about her old age (rather than say, how she will pay her children's school fees or afford to buy a house). These concerns seem to arise more from Western discourses of aging, in a society that venerates youth and associates old age with redundancy and insecurity. The reference to the woman wondering 'what happens when baby Jay doesn't need me anymore', although not a reference to her own baby, is clearly drawn from a discourse of aging which relates to the nuclear family and the 'empty nest' syndrome not really experienced in extended families where old people often care for their own grandchildren and other young children. It is clear which of these discourses is more likely to sell retirement policies. Students can learn to analyse the interests at work in the privileging and backgrounding of different discourses.

An ability to understand the interests at work in different discourses or in their textual manifestations is surely important, whatever the state of the nation. If education can give us as teachers and students access to the politics of meaning it can provide us with the means to achieve some agency in our own lives, with an ability to recognise the discourses which speak

us and the opportunity to consider and change our own practices. Such bit by bit reconstitution of the social is CLA's contribution to a transformative pedagogy. 4

#### Notes

- 1 This quotation is taken from the last chapter of the final draft of Granville's Masters dissertation (prior to final pagination).
- 2 I am grateful to my 1996 AELS 3 students for this insight.
- 3 How much future financial security one can buy for R30 per month is also an important question. The small amount raises some questions about whether or not Mrs Lambert is correct in telling her worker that she 'can stop worrying'.
- 4 I wish to record my appreciation to P Stein and P Watson for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to colleagues in Australia for useful feedback when a different version of this paper was presented there, particularly A Luke.

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