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## **Postcolonial Theory and Cross-culturalism: Collaborative 'Signposts' of Discursive Practices**

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This paper is a forerunner of a detailed piece of work. It explores the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism, and whether they can be regarded as collaborative 'signposts' of discursive practices. The aim of this paper is to move beyond the contemporary constructs of race, culture and identification and into the arena of hybridity and multiplicity and the constituting and reconstituting of Self. In this discussion, I will first outline the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism, and then explore focal points of collaborative discursive practices. In doing so, I will discuss perceptions of language and discourse and their relationships to postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism. In the context of this topic, I shall use Australia as an example of a diverse community and English as the language being discussed under the term 'discursive practices'.

### **Postcolonial Theory**

To engage in a form of postcolonial theory is to engage in the term 'postcolonialism' and its notions of history, agency, representation, identity and discourse. According to the literature emerging in the last decade, there are several theories as to what constitutes the basis of the term (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Jayaweera, 1999; Rajan & Mohanram, 1995; Rizvi & Walsh, 1998). Postcolonialism was traditionally seen as a period of history initialising the 'handing over' of colonised states by what were classified as supreme powers to rulers born and bred in the colonies themselves (Ahamad, 1995). Some literature in this area has focused mainly on analysing these definitions in relation to historical and postcolonial markers at a general and theoretical level (Chakrabarty, 1992; Chow, 1994; Parry, 1994). These discussions have analysed definitions in terms of group behaviour and hegemonic boundaries superimposed by one power on another.

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Aidoo (1991, cited in Mongia, 1996, p. 2) puts forward the perspective that use of postcolonialism in its neutrality and with what may be coined a 'clinical definition' covers up a dangerous period in the lives of people from once-colonised states. Used in this vein, there is no inequity in terms of politics, economy and discourse. Furthering Aidoo's viewpoint, Mongia (1996) posits that un-covering or un-layering definitions allows correction of the imbalances of power that have occurred and are occurring through discursive practices. Implicit in the work of Mongia and other critics such as Chakrabarty (1992), Mohanty (1991) and Spivak (1990) is the argument that the prefix 'post' in postcolonial signifies a change in power structure after the official regime of colonialism. The prefix also signifies the continuing aftermath of such change in discursive practices.

In this vein, Gunew (1998) states that discussion of postcolonial theory requires knowledge of what the theory deals with and what kinds of critical and philosophical traditions it builds on, and should be critiqued in various ways. Extending this notion further, Dirlik (1994) and Slemon (1990) present three fields of postcolonial theory, consolidating these into three referents: a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies; a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism; and a description of discourse informed by an epistemological orientation.

In this paper, I will concentrate on issues relating to the third referent. I will also examine how information, knowledge, belief and value systems are codified discursively to create meaning for everyday living. This definition of postcolonial theory provides a pathway towards exploring the multiplicities of language, identity and the constructs that maintain or uphold a system. It foregrounds the facets of culturalism and seeks to explore the avenues through which subjectivities are constructed, maintained and contested.

### **Cross-culturalism**

To essentialise cross-culturalism and its relativity to postcolonial theory, it is necessary to deconstruct the morphological adjuncts leading to the formulation of the concept. The term 'culture', which forms the basis of this notion, is the capacity of members within a society to take a position enabling them to communicate and function in accordance with the principles and constructs put in place for that purpose. It is also the process of getting to know, to relate to and benefit from the social systems acting as signifiers for the ongoing development of that society. The suffix 'ism' furthers this, constituting the process as a body of knowledge that denotes further progression and development of the Self.

A distinction is made here between 'Self' and 'identity'. The 'Self' refers to the subject and the social values acquired by an individual to position herself/himself within a construct. In this unlayering of the 'Self', there can be multiple positions. 'Identity' refers to the way an individual is

classified in terms of race and the culture she/he is born into, forever remaining within that classification. The 'Self' moves within the construct of what also becomes known as her/his culture. However, this notion of culture is different.

Here, culture is not identified in terms of race (Gilroy, 1991), class or differences of naming for categorisation. If this was the case, culture would become a defining model of political and social subjugation rather than an avenue of cross-cultural collaboration. Further, usage of the term 'race' and 'culture' as a definitive grouping would replicate the hegemonic borders culturalism tries to diffuse. In a postcolonial exploration of the term, this paper has been written in an attempt to define culture as the knowledge and values that the subject or Self requires to live and function within a construct, in the way he/she wishes and in a manner acceptable to whoever else is part of the construct.

Therefore, the term culturalism denotes the flexibility of the Self to engage in the communication and interpretation of verbal and non-verbal signals and to correctly and appropriately respond in a like manner. Lacan (1982) views the theme of culturalism as being at the heart of each individual. However, as Rizvi and Walsh (1998, p. 10) discuss, the idea of an internal homogeneous and authentic culture is an absurdity. Along similar lines, Crowley (1998) refers to 'assumptions of universality' in the knowingness, understanding, recognition and formation of cultural constructs. Halse and Baumgart (1996, p. 39) state that a superficial emphasis on common cultural knowledge may lead to nebulous, melange cultures. All these views implicate that in a superficial and 'on the surface' definition of culture, the multiplicity of the Self is overlooked and a form of discrete classification results.

Moreover, in a complacent acceptance of culturalism, the suffix 'ism' may also be taken as a process of movement that calls for a replacing of one construct of thought with another. It also connotes an adherence to a conscientious direction and perspective that coerces total acceptance and adoption of one set of values over another. If such is the case, then culturalism becomes anachronistic and antithetical. I advocate that in the 'ism' of culturalism, there must be a certain 'give' allowing extension into a space where there is a continual process of movement of ideas and values.

The morphological prefix of 'cross' denotes the crossing of discrete barriers from one construct to another. It also envisages an ongoing expansion of boundaries. This is best illustrated with an example. In Australia, the notion of culturalism is embodied in the trajectories of indigenous heritage, migrant populations and a postcolonial state. No one trajectory is absolute from another. In the same vein, no pathway can be dichotomised from another. The multicultural and multilingual diversity of Australia has led to a constant 'crossing' of ideas, values and linguistic

terminology between cultural groups. This 'movement' can be said to lead to cross-culturalism.

The contradiction here, however, is that one may inadvertently reinstate a construct that relies upon the historical colonial-postcolonial aspect for fact and worth, instead of a postcolonial critique of contemporary discursive practices. Such critique destabilises the historical colonial-postcolonial hegemonic boundaries of the centre and periphery and the subordinate conceptualisation of the 'Other'. This 'Other' comprises subjects in the minority. In an attempt to again 'package' what is being 'unwrapped' in the form of cross-cultural awareness into a neat and tidy construct of cross-culturalism, what results is a model that further divides members of cultural groups into constructs of 'One' and 'Other', where the 'Other' is still a subordinate adjunct of the 'One'. Upholding such a framework for cross-culturalism moves collaboration back to a binary vision with dual and opposing discursive practices.

### **Signposting for Discursive Practices**

Discursive practices derive from the constructs of language embodied in discourse. According to Gee, (1990, p. xv), discourse is 'a combination of 'saying-doing-thinking-feeling-valuing' something. This contention underlies the statement that language is not the expression of unique individuality. Rather, it constructs a member's subjectivity in ways that are socially specific. Derrida (1976) advocates that language is always open to challenge and redefinition with shifts in discursive context. de Saussure (1974) classifies language as a heterogeneous mass of speech facts that can only exist by virtue of a contract signed by the members of a community. Barthes (1986) advocates that if language is socially determined, then acts of representation are sociocultural. This leads to the conclusion that the social constructs put in place within a society determine the way a language is spoken and the purpose it serves in communication. Foucault (1977) refers to communication as a systematically organised discourse of the community.

Furthermore, Derrida (1976) has shown that language is a powerful discourse embedded in context and situation through what he classifies as *differance*. The meaning conveyed by language is produced via the dual strategies of difference and deferral. Schiffrin (1994) describes discourse as language above the sentence, thus indicating that meaning is an intrinsic part of the communicative process. Structural and functional factors become equally important in the consideration of sociolinguistics. In taking a 'discourse in process' rather than 'discourse as product' approach (Schiffrin, 1994), discourse is viewed as a dynamic, ever-changing aspect of language guided by the context in which it is used. Thus, discourse is ruled by the pragmatics of the society in which it serves its purpose and function. In the context of this paper, pragmatics is generally defined as the use of semiotics to engage in speaker-listener interpretation (for a more detailed reference, refer to Schiffrin, 1994, Chapter 6).

If the constructs of language are shown to determine the sustenance and maintenance of a particular discursive practice, the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism intersect as 'signposts'. The third referent of postcolonial theory advocates an analysis of discourse that is informed by an epistemological orientation (Dirlik, 1994; Slemon, 1990). This requires seeking the foundation on which a discourse is constructed and envisaging the Self as having multiple subjectivities it can comfortably relate to and with. Subjectivity is constructed through social organisation, meaning, power and perceptions. Weedon (1994) discusses the issue that subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices. Similarly, Derrida (1976) argues that language is always open to challenge and redefinition with shifts in discursive context. However subjectivity is constituted depends on the discursive relations within which it is located.

'Discursive practices' mean an engagement *with* rather than *to* the subject. The system of a 'status difference' thus becomes diffused and meaning is negotiated through a process of deconstruction. Interaction with language involves construction of subjectivity in ways that are socially specific. With relevance to collaborative 'signposting', this denotes foregrounding the constructs of both the centre and the periphery and examining the dualisms that shape discursive practices. It also means contending with what Bhabha (1983, 1990), Spivak (1990) and Said (1978) describe as a demystifying, decentralising, destigmatising and deconstructing process of historical postcolonialism, turning towards language and engaging with newer and contested discourses. For historical, political and social reasons, the constructs of a discourse may be varied within those of postcolonial theory.

The discourse of cultural hybridity is significant among these variations. Ahmad (1995, p. 286) states that the movement of cultural hybridity is so brisk, one can hardly speak of discrete national cultures that are not fundamentally informed. Bhaba (1983, 1990) discusses the shifting of margins in the authenticity of cultures. In reality, all cultures turn out to be hybrid. This is further discussed by Lavie and Swedenburg (1996, p. 13), who say that 'intercultural creations and miscegenations expose as a hoax the modernist and colonialist discourse concerning the homogeneity of cultures'. Shohat (1992) contends that foregrounding hybridity calls attention to central as well as peripheral characters and allows negotiation of the multiplicity of subject positionings. She further states (p. 331) that hybridity can also become a crucial factor where a notion of the past is 'negotiated as fragmented sets of narrated memories and experiences with which to mobilize contemporary communities'.

Culturally, discursively, politically and socially, the characters are able to accommodate the value systems of a particularly diverse society. This is because a diversity of cultures within a region inevitably evokes human interest in the desire for similarity, adaptation and adoption of strategies and social systems for moving comfortably within a given situation. After a

period of time, these qualities are embraced as an intrinsic part of multiple subject positionings, thereby diffusing the boundaries of 'race' and 'culture' by which the Self or subject's hegemonic worth is measured.

Within the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism, discourse embodies clusters of speech acts that define the discursive practices of a particular society. Austin (1952) and Searle (1969) (cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 160) illustrate speech acts by classifying them into three types: a locutionary act, which shows the conveyance of propositional meaning; an illocutionary act, which shows the performance of a particular language function; and a perlocutionary act, which achieves some kind of effect on the addressee. The use of these three acts depend on the setting, situation and context.

To illustrate this with an example, Christie (1987, p. 18) notes its importance in Aboriginal cultures, where language is used not only to seek and impart information but also to compliment and insult, imitate, entertain, accuse and fulfil a host of other social functions. Thus speech acts not only reflect the functional act of speech but also the way people think, how they are supposed to think and how to interrelate with each other. In a diverse community, this means that individuals need to have knowledge of how language norms differ from one construct to another. What may be correct in one situation may be incorrect or 'not nearly as right' in another.

Again, in correlation with the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism, the process through which a form of discourse is conveyed is via the constructs and constraints of language. Both notions see discourse as encompassing ever-changing norms, values and methods of communication that operate within the social system one is in. To establish collaborative 'signposting' therefore, postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism perceive discursive practices as systematically organised speech acts that present a meaning and denote the values attached to such an act. Each speech act, therefore, can generally be termed a type of discourse. Kress (1985) elaborates upon this by saying that discourse provides a set of possible statements in which a particular topic, object or process is to be talked about. It provides descriptions, rules, sanctions and prohibitions for social actions.

Consequently, learning a language does not merely entail learning a new phonology or syntax; an individual must also learn how to work out or think things through in an unfamiliar way. It also means coming to an understanding that there is more than one way of organising experiences. Halliday and Hasan (1989, p. 46) discuss that learning another language also means learning to make the right predictions and to look at language in the context of a society. Such learning leads to discursive practices; a totality of speech and actions carried out with meanings attached, rather than a random collection of features.

In a diverse community where constant cross-cultural referencing occurs in communication, speakers also have to be aware of the pragmatics of the language. Ignorance of this may fundamentally lead to three things: a non-communication, where a message is not received; a miscommunication, where a wrong message is conveyed; or a communication breakdown where individuals cannot converse because of differing semiotics. This is further illustrated by Levinson (1983), who stresses that when a speaker performs an utterance, she/he accomplishes interactional acts. These enable the speaker to move from one utterance to the next, facilitating coherence and cohesion. If the receiving partner has a limited knowledge of the discourse and values attached to it, then one of the above three consequences may result.

Pragmatics in discursive practices also involves having an awareness of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic failures. A sociopragmatic failure results when a speaker deviates from appropriate meaning. When a speaker tries to perform the right speech but uses the wrong linguistic means, a pragmalinguistic failure occurs (Thomas, 1983). For discursive practices to be collaborative, speakers must become familiar with strategies of communication such as turn taking in conversation, introduction, small talk and question and answer sequences.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have indicated that the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism can be considered collaborative 'markers' of discursive practices. They both focus on the fact that for any form of collaboration to occur, the construct of language - its relation to discourse and the communication that ensues - are reliant upon certain values and expectations. As outlined, language embodied in a form of discourse leads to it becoming a practice. Against a form of postcolonial theory, Bhabha (1983, p. 36) asserts that discourse needs to shift from the 'identification of images as being positive and negative to an understanding of the processes of subjectification'. Discursive practices are therefore seen to be always embedded in value systems, which in turn are related to subjectivity. They advocate the way a society, institution, agency and group should be allowed to function. The phrase 'allowed to' denotes that when discourses become discursive practices, they can be constructed, constituted, manipulated and moulded as a means whereby certain conditions and situations are either maintained or changed.

As outlined, the contention of culturalism denotes a sense of movement. The transfer of ideas and values leading to another notion of cross-culturalism is inherent in this. This 'crossing' of ideology and thought indicates that culture is never static and the very means by which crossing occurs is through systems of discourse. In a diverse community, speakers from different cultures talk about issues in several ways. Topics, incidents and problems are regarded in various ways and may follow different codes of behaviour. In short, the speech acts being followed may have been culturally constructed by necessity.

Cross-culturalism demands consideration of discursive practices not only in terms of linguistic structures but also in the meaning they convey. Interest should focus on what members talk about, the words they use and the understanding they seek and build upon. Language is not isolated from culture. It follows linguistic and social patterns that arise from cultural norms. The language and the non-linguistic activities and settings that form the discursive context need to be considered. This enables the continuation of other discourse and shared experiences, allowing engagement in sequential dialogue that alternates between speaking and listening. Common knowledge can then become established for cross-cultural understanding to continue.

The aim of this paper has not been to draw definitive conclusions in the notions of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism. Rather, it has been to draw attention to how discourses are constituted in these areas and how they can be seen to correlate and intersect at various points, resulting in modes of discursive practices that necessitate the need to accommodate other constructs in the conveyance and transfer of communication from one speaker to another. This paper was also written with the intention of looking beyond absolute constructs and moving into an arena where culture and identity is viewed through hybridity and multiplicity.

By their inherent adjuncts of the 'post' in postcolonialism, the 'ism' in culturalism and the 'cross' in cross-culturalism, the constructs of postcolonialism, culturalism and cross-culturalism are essentially hybrid in character. Within the construct of postcolonial theory, hybridity is based on a seamless boundary. Moreover, the roots of heterogeneity are built into each of these constructs. These can be depicted in the number of nations that have undergone a post-colonial process, the diversity of cultures present in such nations, the many experiences of its members and the varied social groups that are formed. All these evidence the multiple positionings of subject that are in continual process.

Consequently, what can be deduced is that there never was and there never *should be* a discrete divide in the constructs of postcolonialism, culturalism and cross-culturalism. Such a practice can be implemented through discourse. This calls for a deeper exploration of the nomenclature of postcolonial theory and cross-culturalism and an opening up new 'signposts' for collaborative discursive practices.

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