

WRITING AS A DEVELOPMENT IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

C. Bazerman UCSB

Language development is intensely intricately with the development of one's social being, one's relations and cooperations with others, one's feelings of security and anxiety, one's full range of emotions, one's emotional connectedness and distances with others, and one's conscious view of oneself and others. Any adequate account of writing would see each of these issues at play in every text we write and read. Indeed much literary interpretation examines such issues in a limited domain of texts where imagination is at free play. To understand these issues at work in other kinds of texts, it makes sense to look at the deep role of language in the formation of the self, which shapes the face one presents to the world and the inner self that seeks various forms of cooperation and relation to others. These issues are crucial for all writing education, because learning to write means learning to take on a bold presence in the world and enter into complex and sophisticated relations with others, whether one writes accountancy reports, ambassadorial greetings, journalistic accounts, or sociological studies. Students' development as writers is saturated with issues of identity, affect, elation, and one's place in the world.

A number of traditions have considered the relation of language development to the formation of social, communicative, active selves. Among those are the phenomenological tradition leading to microinteractional sociology (Heritage), the soviet sociocultural tradition which has spawned the more recent activity theory (Wertsch, Vygotsky, Luria, Cole, Engestrom), the eighteenth century Scottish moralist and dissident traditions (Smith and Priestley, for examples), leading to the foundations of modern liberalism, and the American pragmatist tradition.

In the American pragmatist tradition, George Herbert Mead and John Dewey saw language development and social interaction as crucial in the formation of self, and they greatly influenced the founder of linguistic anthropology Edward Sapir who spent several years at Chicago with them. During those same years, at the recommendation of other Chicago sociologists, Sapir met the psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, and they immediately became fast friends (Perry). Sullivan's contact with Sapir and the Chicago sociologists gave him the necessary concepts to fully develop his biographical approach to psychiatry which he had been developing for the previous decade. The result was a psychiatrically rich account of the self, based in language and social development--an account which allows us to consider how writing builds upon deeply personal experiences of the self at the same time as it provides new spheres in which the self can develop in interaction with others (see also Bazerman).

Sullivan's ideas reached their fullest expression in the posthumous *Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. In that book he draws a picture of the developing person trying to satisfy needs in a social and cultural world, developing relations with others and learning language within social interactions shaped by the material and cultural conditions of the time and place. The infant's most fundamental and deepest learning occurs in activity situations with primary caregivers. In such activities as feeding, the child learns to coordinate with others and integrate in shared activities, satisfying mutual needs. Part of that coordination is the sensing of anxiety within the partner, which then raises anxiety within the infant, for the anxiety indicates possible difficulty and uncertainty of outcome

of the situation. It is out of discovering the ranges of security, interpersonal unease, and terror in interaction that the child forms a sense of the self (the good me—the range of action and interaction in which I will feel secure), the boundary areas of insecurity and anxiety (the bad me) and those interactions and activities beyond coherent perception and possible participation because they are so deeply imbued with extreme anxiety (the not-me—the realm of uncanny sensations). One also learns means of coping with and avoiding those situations that raise anxiety and ways of deflecting one's attention entirely from situations that threaten one's very ideas of the self. As one moves out into the world, one encounters all kinds of people and situations that may challenge the secure senses of the self one may have developed within the tenderesses (such as they are) in one's family. One's sense of one's self may expand as one experiments with new ranges of interaction, but most people spend much time in security operations, keeping at bay the anxiety aroused by life's variety.

Thus we see in this portrait of development a model consistent with the pragmatist account of active selves engaged in purposeful need-satisfying interaction. Moreover, Sullivan provides a mechanism for self-formation very closely allied to Mead; here the individual begins to sense oneself in relation to the response and anticipated response to others. Because self-forming situations are need-satisfying, and thus motivated, the individual has major stakes in making interactions go well and anticipating the responses of necessary partners, so as to maintain the cooperation of the other. Sullivan adds to the Meadian picture the development of the anxiety system. This anxiety system defines areas within which the person operates comfortably and the areas of discomfort that make it difficult or even impossible to operate, as one expects and fears that one's partner in the need satisfaction will become uncooperative. The perceived potential of social rupture evokes anxiety.

The self system develops from affective states in which some behaviors feel more comfortable and secure while others feel anxious or uncanny or insurmountably aversive, no matter how strong the need impulse or attraction. We can begin to see socialized behavior as a kind of tropism, where one is drawn to anticipated satisfaction and repelled by feared disruption of social bonds. The anticipation and fear grows as much from one's history of interactions, including the highly powerful early interactions with first caregivers, as from a realistic assessment of the current circumstances. In this pull of needs and desires and push of aversions, one finds a way to act, although the conflict of these forces may at times make it difficult or even impossible to find a satisfying solution, so that one has to abandon either the need or the security.

A third element of the pragmatist picture developed by Sullivan is the idea of development through a series of interactions over the life course. The Freudian analytic school sees much of personality and the rest of life as deeply fettered by the earliest sets of social relationships within the family—primarily with the parents, and barely with sibs. Sullivan, while recognizing the importance of the earliest relations, also recognizes that the course of life brings us into important and motivated contact with others, with whom we try to get along, cooperate, and satisfy needs. With this expanding cast of characters we meet new developmental challenges, explore new possibilities, learn new forms of interaction, and perhaps begin to venture into those realms which prior experience shrouded in anxiety. New relations, with partners more comfortable with areas of experience that were beyond the scope of previous partners, may offer intimations of

security in behaviors and situations where we previously had sensed only impending difficulty. Thus life brings the potential of expanding experience, competence, opportunities and motives. These potentials do not at all deny the strength of early self-formation and the power of anxiety to lead us to keep replicating habitual behaviors, but the potentials do suggest that habit is not necessarily the end of the story.

Complex life trajectories and transformations of the self, though perhaps in part driven by biological imperatives, are deeply constrained, shaped, and afforded by opportunities within one's social and cultural and economic and material milieu. Culturally learned patterns of child rearing, culturally general taboos and anxieties, and general beliefs about parenting and families, for example, influence parental behavior and expression.

Similarly, economic and sociocultural conditions influence the range of people one is likely to meet at different junctures in life (at school, in summer camp, on the job); the patterns and restraints one feels on forming friendships and sexual attachments; the range of people considered available; the social meanings attached to alliances; the challenges of daily living; and many other opportunities and demands of life tasks.

Thus life offers a continuous field for learning, not just of an abstracted academic sort, but of the skills and means of participation in life. These opportunities for learning are shaped by one's anxieties, sense of self, focussed attention, motivated projects—and who one has contact with to participate with, learn from, and carry out need-satisfying projects. Sullivan's dynamic model of development has clear affinities to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, and Engestrom's account of learning by expanding.

The relevance of such issues for language and writing is that language and writing are media of expansion, learning, and interaction. Language use is at the point of interaction with others, where our motives meet the motives of others with their different self systems, perspectives and motives. Language use and writing always carry some challenge and growth along with the threat of anxieties, unless the communication goes down such well-worn and familiar tracks that everybody knows exactly where things are going and is perfectly comfortable and secure. Otherwise, the communication and shared activity are rife with possibilities of crossed purposes, misunderstandings, and disjunctions that will lead to ruptures or redefinitions of the situation. Saying or writing something novel or forceful or meaningful always puts you on the line.

One's use of language is learned within that developmental history of relations, and the meanings and uses of language are deeply colored by the emotions of security and anxiety. We all learn to disrupt situations that make us anxious by changing the subject, leading the situation down alternative paths that protect our security, or otherwise being disjunctive of the trouble we sense coming. The transformed situation may not meet our needs or the needs of others, but at least our anxiety is alleviated. In the most extreme cases, in the lives of people who have consistently unfortunate and anxiety raising experiences, people learn to use language far more to ward off anxiety by placating, misleading, or distancing others than to communicate with others for the positive mutual satisfaction of needs. In such cases there develops a radical disjunction between, on one hand, one's own needs and embodied experience—that is, the self one knows as one withdraws from the anxiety of relationships—and, on the other, the face one presents to the world to keep that world at bay. This social learning, of security and anxiety, of self definition and taboo, of language use to modulate and fend off anxiety, adds another dimension to the social learning of language, culture, and interaction to those more

typically noted by Vygotsky and socio-cultural psychologists. Further, Sullivan's account of anxiety adds aversive and mind-clouding affect to the goal-shaped affects of motive and frustration in the Vygotskian canon.

While Sullivan sees the origins of the self-system developing out of prelinguistic sensations of anxiety, he sees the development of linguistic reflection on the self as extremely powerful in the extensive construction and monitoring of identity and in choice making as part of action. For Sullivan, as Vygotsky, language is the chief tool of reflective action. Sullivan, as Vygotsky, gives an account of the development of internal linguistic thought through a process by which language goes sub-vocal and private, a process that Sullivan characterizes as reverie formation.

Language for Sullivan, as for Vygotsky is a means of organizing learning and thought. The developing child, according to Sullivan, as he or she learns language and thereby learns to give shape to thought and coherence to perceptions of the world, moves through stages of prototaxic, parataxic, and syntactic modes of thought. These stages are closely congruent with Vygotsky's stages of children's thought and perception 1) prior to the reorganization of thought through language, 2) as the child makes associative connections while using language to organize thought (Vygotsky's sub-stages of congeries, complexes and collections, and pseudo-concepts), and 3) when the adolescent develops coherent systems of language characterized as true concepts, and accommodates thinking to the disciplined and schooled systems of concepts presented through the formal learning of the society or scientific concepts.

Sullivan's developmental model of persons learning to act (in large part through language) in fulfillment of needs in interpersonal relations within specific sociocultural conditions and within particular relationships allows us to consider the role of language and literacy development without being caught up in particular cultural or historic forms of participation taken to be natural. We can see language and literacy development as taking many courses in relation to the historical and social moment a person finds herself in, the particularities of the person's prior experience and current motives, and the particularities of the communicative system and situations one is addressing.

Although Sullivan never specifically raises issues of writing, he provides a framework of thinking about such familiar writing issues as anxiety; articulating, formulating, and synthesizing knowledge; the cognitive consequences of anticipating and addressing audience in clarifying thought and validating perception; the changing roles for writing as one moves through one's life course and life stages; the cultural variation of literate tasks and literacy's relation to personality and personality development. Writing, because it is somewhat removed from the social circumstances it participates in may allow us to pursue some thoughts it would be too anxious to pursue in the immediate presence of others, but it also leaves us alone with our phantasms of dire consequences, unrelieved by the reassuring presence of an accepting auditor. Writing gives us the space to turn our experience and learning into coherent, reflective words, thereby providing means for developing personally meaningful knowledge. Writing, through rhetorical anticipation of our audience and the effect of our words, provides opportunities for us to become more reflective and considered in our relations with audiences and the social interpretations of our emergent words. And Sullivan gives us a developmental context and a social landscape within which we can make sense of our changing literacy needs, practices, and tools.

Sullivan's awareness of the particularity of each person's history, relations, communicative patterns, and anxiety systems along with the particularity of each set of social relation and the particularity of each set of events which motivates communicative action, should warn us as teachers against assuming a simple, single pathway to writing. Instead he attunes us to the individual path each person must struggle through in learning to use language, in expanding through the constraints of anxiety, in fulfilling personal need and motive through literate action. Nonetheless, he reminds us to attend to each student's personal trajectory and motive for writing as well as to always look out for the ways in which anxiety limits students' ambition and intellectual clarity, leading students away from addressing what the task and learning demands they do address. Sullivan attunes us to the value of meaningful challenge as well as to the difficulty of addressing those things that may be most meaningful and needful for us to address. Most of all Sullivan attunes us to the complex personal and interpersonal stakes in writing and in schooling.

Sullivan, like Vygotsky, shows us an optimistic potential for learning and growth. Sullivan, however, does not see that growth as necessarily easy, as we must constantly face the anxiety of those things that stretch us beyond that which we are comfortable with. This discomfiting anxiety makes it difficult to see what lies in front and around us and leads us to want to turn our eyes and thoughts elsewhere, back to the worlds we are comfortable in, where we find a familiar self-definition and perception, in interactions where both ourselves and our partners are secure. Further, in participating in growth-oriented relationships, we must not only have others be persuaded of and appropriate the innovations we create as useful to their own ends, as in the Vygotskian world, we must address the resistances of their anxieties, uncertainties, terrors, and senses of where self-security lies. Sullivan in this way can provide us means to see why writing may be so difficult, why we may resist and struggle with some modes of expression, why we find some audiences easier to address than others. At the same time Sullivan provides an account of the enormous possibilities of self formation, expansion, discovery, reflection, and growth that people regularly report associated with writing. And he allows us to see these issues not just as individuals in isolation struggling with individual genius or blindness, but as social communicative issues of the difficulties and rewards of integrating with others as part of social projects.

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