Legitimation in discourse and communication

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ABSTRACT. The article sets out a framework for analysing the way discourses construct legitimation for social practices in public communication as well as in everyday interaction. Four key categories of legitimation are distinguished: 1) 'authorization', legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority is vested; 2) 'moral evaluation', legitimation by reference to discourses of value; 3) rationalization, legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the social knowledges that endow them with cognitive validity; and 4) mythopoesis, legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions. Examples are drawn from texts legitimating or de-legitimating compulsory education, including children's books, brochures for parents, teacher training texts, and media texts.

KEY WORDS: *authority, communication, compulsory education, context, discourse, moral discourses*

Introduction

'Every system of authority attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy', Max Weber wrote, almost 100 years ago (1964: 325). Language is without doubt the most important vehicle for these attempts. Berger and Luckmann have even argued that, effectively, all of language is legitimation (1966: 112):

> Incipient legitimation is present as soon as a system of linguistic objectification of human experience is transmitted. For example, the transmission of a kinship vocabulary ipso facto legitimates the kinship structure. The fundamental legitimating 'explanations' are, so to speak, built into the vocabulary.

In this article I set out a framework for analysing the language of legitimation, or, as Habermas has put it (1976: 97), for 'demarcating types of legitimate authority (...) according to the forms and contents of legitimation', as they occur in

public communication as well as in everyday interaction. I will discuss four major categories of legitimation:[1]

1) *Authorization*, that is, legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested.
2) *Moral evaluation*, that is, legitimation by (often very oblique) reference to value systems.
3) *Rationalization*, that is, legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity.
4) *Mythopoesis*, that is, legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions.

These forms of legitimation can occur separately or in combination. They can be used to legitimize, but also to de-legitimize, to critique. They can occupy the best part of specific instances of text and talk which may hardly refer to what it is that is being legitimized, or they can be thinly sprinkled across detailed descriptive or prescriptive accounts of the practices and institutions they legitimize. And they are all realized by specific linguistic resources and configurations of linguistic resources. In this article, I will describe these resources and the different types of legitimation they express, in the hope that this will be of use both for critically analysing the construction of legitimation in discourse, and, more generally, for reflection on the problems that face legitimation today.

Methodology

Berger and Luckmann have defined legitimation as follows (1966: 111):

> Legitimation provides the 'explanations' and justifications of the salient elements of the institutional tradition. (It) 'explains' the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings and (…) justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives.

This suggests that a decontextualized study of legitimation is not possible. Legitimation is always the legitimation of the practices of specific institutional orders. When I worked out the descriptive framework I present in this article, I started out from this premise and used an institutionally specific corpus of texts, texts that regulate and legitimize a particular institution, namely compulsory education. It was a diverse collection of texts, including teacher training texts, brochures for parents, books for young children, press reports, radio broadcasts, advertisements for school uniforms and necessities, and also critical texts, texts that sought to de-legitimize compulsory schooling, such as Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971). They represented a range of genres, including reports, narratives, advertisements, advice columns and so on, and they addressed a range of audiences – teachers, parents, children, general readers, etc. But despite this diversity they had one thing in common. They all provided some version, some recontextualization, of a particular initiatory practice fundamental to the institution of compulsory

education, the 'first day at school', and they all provided not just information about this practice, but also legitimations for it, albeit to different degrees, and in different ways.

Essentially, my methodology consisted of first separating out the clauses and parts of clauses that represented the actual activities of teachers, parents, children, and other participants, the settings and timings of these activities, and the tools and materials involved in them. That left in each case a 'residue' of elements that could not be said to add anything to the description of what actually went on during 'the first day'. These elements were of three kinds:

1) Reactions

Many texts described not only the activities of teachers, parents and children, but also their feelings, especially those of children, and, in texts for teachers, those of parents (cf. Van Leeuwen, 1995). Children's texts, for instance, not only explained to children what school would be like and provided them with a model for how to behave in school, they also urged them to *like* school, to feel happy in school. Texts aimed at parents showed parents not just what to do, but also what to feel ('Don't worry if your child cries', 'Enjoy the time you now have to yourself', etc.).

2) Purposes

The texts also ascribed purposes to the actions of teachers, parents and children, and often the same actions were given different purposes in texts addressing teachers, texts addressing parents and texts addressing children (cf. Van Leeuwen, 2000). In a children's text, a child would 'run towards a brand-new slide' in the playground for the sake of fun, in a teacher's text she would 'use specific apparatus to promote muscular coordination'.

3) Legitimations

Legitimation, finally, adds the answer, sometimes explicitly, sometimes more obliquely, to the question 'Why' – 'Why should we do this?' and 'Why should we do this in this way?'

A striking example occurred in one of the children's books I studied. The children are in the classroom for the first time and the first lesson begins with the teacher holding up pictures of animals and the children responding (Leete-Hodge, n.d.: 39–40):

> Miss Carter held up some large coloured pictures of animals. 'Cat,' 'dog,' 'horse,' shouted the children as they recognized the animals. 'Bird,' yelled Mandy as she saw a sparrow appear. 'Good,' said Miss Carter, 'now what about this one?' and she held up a picture of a funny looking brown animal in a cage.

> 'A monkey,' called one little boy who remembered seeing a monkey cry when he had been taken to the zoo for his holiday treat. The poor thing could not reach for a nut that someone had thrown him!

The story of the 'first day at school' was interrupted here by another, embedded story, a brief story of a visit to the zoo, and of a monkey who was unable to pick up the nut that 'someone had thrown him'. It was not the only time that animals

appeared in what were otherwise relatively straightforward narrative accounts of 'the first day'. There were dogs who were not allowed inside and could not understand why, and there were children taking animals into the classroom, which would then result in mayhem of one kind or another. In other words, schooling was represented here as the transition from an animal-like to a truly human state. This is an old theme. In *The History of Animals*, Aristotle already wrote that young children differ little from animals. By going to school, the story of the monkey suggests, the child gains access to rewards that remain barred from monkeys forever. Schooling is legitimized in terms of an evolutionary discourse in which humans are at the top of the evolutionary ladder.

Authorization

I have characterized legitimation as an answer to the spoken or unspoken 'why' question – 'Why should we do this?' or 'Why should we do this in this way?' One type of answer to that question, one of the 'forms and contents of legitimation', is 'because I say so', where the 'I' is someone in whom some kind of authority is vested, or 'because so-and-so says so', where the authority' is vested in 'so-and-so'. This I will refer to as 'personal authorization' or 'personal authority legitimation'. The question is, who can exercise this authority, and how.

PERSONAL AUTHORITY

In the case of undiluted personal authority, legitimate authority is vested in a person because of their status or role in a particular institution, for example, parents and teachers in the case of children. Such authorities then need not invoke any justification for what they require others to do other than a mere 'because I say so', although in practice they may of course choose to provide reasons and arguments. Bernstein (1971: 154) saw personal authority as one of the hallmarks of the 'positional family' in which 'judgements are a function of the status of the member' and 'disputes are settled by the relative power inhering in the respective statuses'. Not surprisingly, it is, in my corpus, most commonly associated with children.

Personal authority legitimation typically takes the form of a 'verbal process' clause (Halliday, 1985: 129) in which the 'projected clause', the authority's utterance, contains some form of obligation modality, as in this example from one of the children's stories in my corpus:

Magnus sat down. Because the teacher said they had to.

A specific form is what, elsewhere (2005: 131), I called the 'time summons'. Here it is not so much the activity itself, as its timing which is legitimized through personal authority, as, for example, in

'It's time to go home', she said [i.e. the Mother]

EXPERT AUTHORITY

In the case of expert authority, legitimacy is provided by expertise rather than status. This expertise may be stated explicitly, for instance by mentioning

credentials, but if the expert is well-known in the given context it may be taken for granted, as in certain types of academic discourse which, rather than providing arguments and evidence, quote intellectual megastars, or just add their names between brackets.

Typically, expert legitimation takes the form of 'verbal process clauses' or 'mental process clauses' (e.g. Professor so-and-so believes...') with the expert as subject. In multimodal texts the credentials may be visual, signified by laboratory paraphernalia, books, or other professional attributes. The experts' utterances themselves will carry some kind of recommendation, some kind of assertion that a particular course of action is 'best' or 'a good idea'. No reasons needs to be provided, no other answer to the question of 'why should I do this?' than a mere 'because Dr Juan says so'. Expert authority may of course be qualified, as in the first of the two examples below ('some experts', rather than 'experts'):

> Some experts say it is best to kiss the child, not look back and go.

> Dr Juan believes it may be a good idea to spend some time with the child in class.

In the age of professionalism, expertise has acquired authority in many domains of activity that had previously been the province of families, for instance child rearing, nutrition, and eventually even sexuality. 'In any area where a human need can be imagined', Ivan Illich wrote (1977: 19), 'the new professions, dominant, authoritative, monopolistic, legalized – and at the same time debilitating and effectively disabling the individual – have become exclusive experts of the public good'. Today experts increasingly have to surrender their professional autonomy to management structures, and the public is increasingly made aware that most problems have more than one expert solution. As a result expert authority may be waning, albeit only slowly.

ROLE MODEL AUTHORITY

In the case of role model authority, people follow the example of role models or opinion leaders. The role models may be members of a peer group or media celebrities imitated from afar, and the mere fact that these role models adopt a certain kind of behaviour, or believe certain things, is enough to legitimize the actions of their followers. Sometimes 'endorsements' are required, as in the examples below, where teachers are urged to follow the example of 'wise' and 'experienced' colleagues. In other contexts other endorsements would be required, for example, 'cool' or 'smart'.

> The wise teacher finds out the correct way to pronounce the child's name.

> Experienced teachers involve the whole class in supporting the newcomer.

Role model authority plays a particularly important role in advertising and lifestyle media. Home decoration magazines, for instance, legitimize their prescriptions ('How to create your own dream home') with stories of the way media personalities or exemplary non-celebrities renovate and decorate their homes ('Penny Minter-Kemp had always wanted to live in a Georgian house, so she set about creating her own look-alike version from a 1950s farmhouse'). As many celebrities are

instantly recognizable, role model authority can be conveyed visually, simply by showing celebrities engaged in the actions that are to be legitimized.

The theoretical foundations for the legitimacy of role models were laid in the 1930s, by a then new form of American psychology, symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism focused on the way people 'take on the attitudes of the groups to which they belong' (p. 33), of the 'significant others' in their immediate and their broader cultural environment. After the Second World War, American popular culture spread the idea of the role model, encouraging young people across the world to take their cues from their peers and from popular culture, rather than from their elders and from tradition. This in turn facilitated the rapid turnover of consumer preferences that has become so vital to the contemporary economy, and to the 'lifestyle' identities it has fostered.

IMPERSONAL AUTHORITY

Not all authority legitimation is personal. There is also the impersonal authority of laws, rules and regulations. The answer to the unspoken 'why' question is then, not 'because I say so' or 'because Dr Juan says so' or 'because Penny Minter-Kemp does it', but 'because the laws (the rules, the policies, the guidelines, etc.) say so'. Impersonal authorities can be the subject of 'verbal process clauses' just as readily as personal authorities ('The rules state that ...'; 'The law says that ...'). But the indispensable element in legitimations of this kind is the presence of nouns such as 'policy', 'regulation', 'rule', 'law', etc. or their cognate adjectives and adverbs (e.g. 'compulsory', 'mandatory', 'obligatory'), which often appear in impersonal clauses such as:

> It is the policy in her area to admit children termly after their fifth birthday.

> Playtime is usually a compulsory break in the programme.

THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION

Although the authority of tradition has been declining in many domains, it may still be invoked, particularly through key words like 'tradition', 'practice', 'custom', 'habit'. Here the implicit or explicit answer to the 'why' question is, not 'because it is compulsory', but 'because this is what we always do' or 'because this is what we have always done'. It is then assumed that this will, by itself, carry enough weight to go unchallenged:

> It was the practice for children in infant schools to be given free milk daily.

However, in the case of tradition the 'why' question is less often asked. The rules of tradition are enforced by everyone, rather than by specific agents: 'Each agent has the means of acting as a judge of others and himself', as Bourdieu put it (1977: 17). Everyone has a know-how that is not only experienced as having always existed, but also as not in need of being made explicit or justified.

THE AUTHORITY OF CONFORMITY

In the case of conformity, finally, the answer to the 'why' question is not 'because that's what we always do', but 'because that's what everybody else does', or

'because that's what most people do'. The implicit message is, 'Everybody else is doing it, and so should you' or 'Most people are doing it, and so should you'. No further argument.

Sometimes conformity legitimation takes the form of an explicit comparison, as in this example:

> Then she let go of Mummy's hand and skipped along towards the open gate of the playground, just as Uncle Jack and Uncle Ned, Auntie Mary and Mummy had done, when they were children.

Most often, however, it is realized through high frequency modality, as in:

> The majority of teachers keep records of their progress.

> Many schools now adopt this practice.

In the age of statistics, there is increasing slippage between the rule of law and the rule of conformity. Contemporary law makers increasingly believe that, if most people are doing it, it cannot be wrong, and should be legalized.

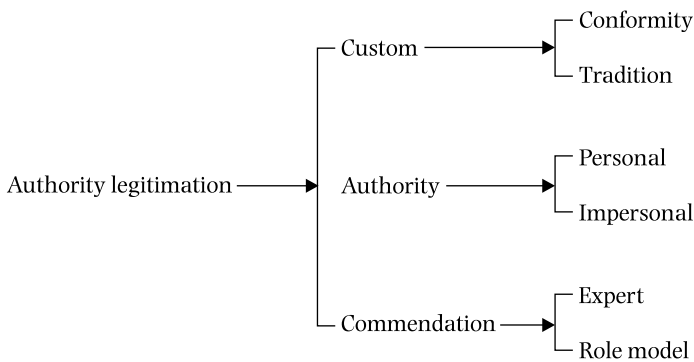Figure 1 summarizes the essential categories of authority legitimation.

FIGURE 1. *Types of authority legitimation*

Moral evaluation

Moral evaluation legitimation is based on moral values, rather than imposed by some kind of authority without further justification. In some cases moral value is simply asserted by troublesome words such as 'good' and 'bad' which freely travel between moral, aesthetic and hedonistic domains and often combine with authority legitimation, as when President Bush legitimizes aggressive policies by pronouncing his enemies an 'axis of evil'. But in most cases moral evaluation is linked to specific discourses of moral value. However, these discourses are not made explicit and debatable. They are only hinted at, by means of adjectives such as 'healthy', 'normal', 'natural', 'useful' and so on. These adjectives are then the tip of a submerged iceberg of moral values. They trigger a moral concept, but are detached from the system of interpretation from which they derive, at least on a conscious level. They transmute moral discourses into the kind of 'generalized

motives' which, as Habermas has said (1976: 36), are now 'widely used to ensure mass loyalty'.

As a result it is not possible to find an explicit, linguistically motivated method for identifying moral evaluations of this kind. As discourse analysts we can only 'recognize' them, on the basis of our common-sense cultural knowledge. The usefulness of linguistic discourse analysis stops at this point. Historical discourse research has to take over. Only the social and cultural historian can explain the moral status of these expressions, by tracing them back to the moral discourses that underlie them, and by undoing the 'genesis amnesia' (Bourdieu) that allows us to treat such moral evaluations as commonsense values. In an earlier study (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999), Ruth Wodak and I studied how Viennese magistrates legitimize the refusal of applications from immigrant workers to be reunited with their families by invoking issues of health and hygiene, for instance by arguing that the dwellings of immigrant workers cannot fulfil the 'public hygiene conditions' necessary to provide their children with sufficient space for ensuring the 'sensible protection of the life environment' that is 'beneficial to the educational development of the child'. Such concerns originally became legitimate areas of government control in the early 20th century, for instance in connection with public housing projects and obligatory physical education in schools. At that time they formed part of a new, social democratic discourse of values that had to be argued for explicitly. Today they have passed into common sense, even in the legal arguments of Viennese magistrates.

EVALUATION

Evaluative adjectives play a key role in moral evaluation legitimation. However, as Leech (1966) noted in his study of advertising English, many adjectives are at once 'designative' and 'attributive'. They communicate both concrete qualities of actions or objects and commend them in terms of some domain of values: 'praise is mingled with practicality' (p. 130), as for instance in the case of favoured advertising adjectives such as 'green', 'crisp', 'cool', 'golden'. This too makes moral evaluation covert and seeks to shield it from debate and argument.

Many of the examples from the 'first day at school' corpus use adjectives such as 'normal', and 'natural' to legitimize the reactions of parents. These adjectives then modify either a nominal group which has a nominalized reference to a practice (or one or more of its constituent actions or reactions) as its head (as in 'a natural and healthy response'), or an attribute in a relational clause which has the practice (or a constituent action of reaction) as its subject (as in 'being upset is natural'):

> It is perfectly normal to be anxious about starting school.

> It is only natural that the first days of school are upsetting.

> Showing signs of stress about starting school is a natural and healthy response.

In other words, do not take your distress as signalling that what happens here is not right, not legitimate. It is 'normal', 'natural', 'healthy'.

'Naturalization' legitimation may also be achieved by reference to time or to the concept of 'change'. This occurs particularly often in children's books, as in the following examples:

> Soon Autumn would be here and Mark and Mandy would have to start school.

> Mary Kate was five. She had been five for a whole week and tomorrow she would be going to school.

At which age, or in which month, children start school is a matter of the policies of education authorities, and differs from authority to authority. But to the child it is represented here as a life change that is just as impossible to stop as the rhythm of day and night or of the seasons. 'Naturalization' is a specific form of moral evaluation, a form which in fact denies morality and replaces moral and cultural orders with the 'natural order'. Morality and nature become entangled here, and discourse analytical methods cannot disentangle them. The only criterion for distinguishing between a true natural order and a moral and cultural order disguising itself as a natural order, is the question of whether we are dealing with something that can, in principle, be changed by human intervention. And that is not always an easy question to answer.

ABSTRACTION

Another way of expressing moral evaluations is by referring to practices (or to one or more of their component actions or reactions) in abstract ways that 'moralize' them by distilling from them a quality that links them to discourses of moral values. Instead of 'the child goes to school for the first time', we might say 'the child takes up independence', so that the practice of schooling is legitimized in terms of a discourse of 'independence'. Instead of 'playing in the playground' we might say 'get on with others' or 'cooperate' which legitimizes the opportunities for playing which the school creates in terms of a discourse of 'sociability'. Instead of 'attending parents' nights' we might say 'build up a relationship with the school' or 'be involved with the school' – abstractions which foreground desired and legitimate qualities of cooperation, and of engagement and commitment.

ANALOGIES

Another common method of expressing moral evaluation is the analogy – comparisons in discourse almost always have a legitimatory or de-legitimatory function. Here the implicit answer to the question 'Why must I do this?' or 'Why must I do this in this way?' is not, 'because it is good', but 'because it is like another activity which is associated with positive values' (or, in the case of negative comparison, 'because it is not like another activity which is associated with negative values'). Sometimes the comparison is implicit. An activity that belongs to one social practice is described by a term which, literally, refers to an activity belonging to another social practice, and the positive or negative values which, in the given socio-cultural context, are attached to that other activity, are then transferred to the original activity. Ivan Illich, in his critique of schooling (1971), for instance, imports terms from the military, the prison, etc. to refer to the actions of teachers, and speaks of 'drilling pupils', 'incarcerating pupils' and so on.

Comparisons can also be expressed explicitly, through similarity conjunction, or circumstances of comparison:

> Like an adult starting in a new job ... the child will be worried.

> It will become as automatic as cleaning your teeth.

In the example below the comparison is narrativized. Schooling is compared to maternal care through reference to a picture of a 'sheep and her lambs' on the wall. Needless to say, this comparison may invoke an ambiguous set of other cultural references as well, as sheep are a major source of comparisons in the Bible.

> The room was light with rows of desks just like his, and pictures on the walls. One showed a big sheep and her lambs. He liked that, but the map did not look very interesting.

My final two examples extend comparisons across a stretch of discourse – the first in order to legitimize, the second in order to de-legitimize schooling:

> When a seedling is transplanted from one place to another, the transplantation may be a stimulus or a shock. The careful gardener seeks to minimize shock, so that the plant is re-established as quickly as possible. Similarly, for the child moving from one provision to another, a smooth transition requires that the change is sufficient to be stimulating but not so drastic as to cause shock.

> Children are protected by neither the First nor the Fifth Amendment when they stand before that secular priest, the teacher. The child must confront a man who wears an invisible triple crown, like a papal tiara. The symbol of triple authority combines in one person for the child, the teacher pontificates as pastor, prophet and priest – he is at once guide, teacher and administrator of a sacred ritual.

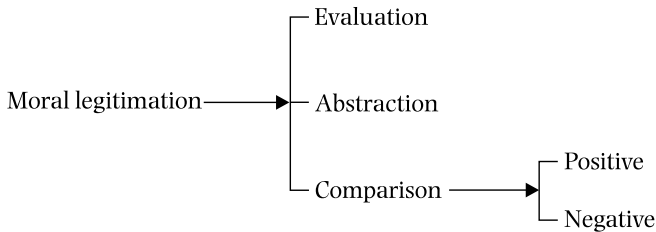Figure 2 summarizes the essential categories of moral evaluation.

FIGURE 2. *Types of moral evaluation legitimation*

Rationalization

In contemporary discourse, moralization and rationalization keep each other at arm's length. In the case of moral evaluation, rationality has gone underground. And as we will see in this section, in the case of rationalization, morality remains oblique and submerged, even though no rationalization can function as legitimation without it.

I will distinguish two main types of rationality. Instrumental rationality legitimates practices by reference to their goals, uses and effects. Theoretical rationality legitimates practices by reference to a natural order of things, but much more explicitly so than the kinds of naturalization I discussed earlier.

INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALIZATION

Like legitimations, purposes are constructed in discourse in order to explain why social practices exist, and why they take the forms they do. What is the purpose of going to school? And what is the purpose of giving schooling the form it takes in our society? The question is, are all purposes also legitimations? I believe not. In order to serve as legitimations, purpose constructions must contain an element of moralization, in the sense in which I have described it in the previous section. Only this can turn purposes and purposiveness into what Habermas (1976: 22) has called a 'strategic-utilitarian morality'.

Departing from Weber's account of the way modern western society has made science, morality and art into distinct domains, Habermas characterizes the institutions that regulate different kinds of social action in terms of the validity claims, or 'kinds of truth' which underlie and legitimize them. Thus 'teleological action', the category I am concerned with in this section, is founded on the principle of success, of 'whether it works or not', that is, on a rationality of means and ends. 'Conversation' is founded on the criterion of truth, of whether an action truthfully represents states of affairs in the objective world. 'Norm-conformative action' is founded on the principle of right and wrong, on whether an action is morally justified. And 'dramaturgical action' is founded on the principle of honesty, of whether the action is sincere and whether the actor is truthful to his or her feelings.

Focusing on 'teleological action', consider the following two sets of examples:

His mother joins the queue to pay his dinner money to the teacher.

The reception teachers went to the nursery unit to see their prospective pupils.

Mary Kate went upstairs after breakfast to have another look at them [i.e. her new school satchel, pinny, etc.]

Jane's teacher used eye contact and facial expression to establish positive bonds with her.

The following strategies were employed to make the introduction to PE more smooth.

The children use specific apparatus and movements to promote muscular co-ordination and agility.

All examples contain the same three basic elements: an activity ('going upstairs', 'using apparatus', etc.), a purpose link (the preposition 'to') and the purpose itself, which may either be another activity or a state (e.g. 'have another look', 'make smooth'). But in the first three examples, the purpose is a *generalized action*. The actions inside the purpose clause are the kind of straightforward generalized representations of actions that could serve as labels for whole activity sequences and form what Roland Barthes (1977) called the 'nuclei' of activity sequences.

The other actions, the more 'micro' actions whose purposefulness is established in the text, are purposeful *in relation to* these nuclei, as parts of the whole, necessary preparations for the nuclear activity, and so on. 'Joining the queue', for instance, is a component action of an activity sequence of which 'paying dinner money to the teacher' is the nucleus and main purpose. As a result the whole of the sequence can be called 'paying dinner money to the teacher'. In the second three examples the process inside the purpose clause is a *moralized action* in the sense in which I have described it above, an expression which refers to an action by distilling from it a quality (such as 'agile', 'smooth') which can 'moralize' it, link it to a discourse of values. 'Smooth', for instance, connotes a discourse of efficiency, in which actions, to be legitimate, must unfold in an orderly manner, without friction, without hitches, without disturbances.

All this applies of course also to the idea of purpose itself. Expressions like 'it is useful', 'it is effective' and so on are themselves legitimatory, descendants of philosophical traditions such as utilitarianism and pragmatism, which explicitly argued for purposefulness, usefulness and effectiveness as criteria of truth and foundations for norm-comformative, ethical behaviour.

Given these preambles a number of different types of instrumentality can be distinguished. In the case of *goal-orientation*, purposes are constructed as 'in people', as conscious or unconscious motives, aims, intentions, goals, etc. This requires a) that the agency of the actor of the purposeful actor is explicitly expressed, and b) that the purposeful action and the purpose have the same agent, or, if the purpose is a state, that the person to whom that state is attributed is also the agent of the purposeful action, in other words, the formula is *'I do x in order to do (or be, or have) y'*. This can then be realized explicitly, by a purpose clause with 'to', 'in order to', 'so as to', etc., as in the first example below, or remain implicit, as in the second example.

> Jane's teacher used eye contact and facial expression to establish positive bonds with her.

> Your child may respond by spending hours happily entertaining herself drawing while she develops her visual, creative and motor skills.

The difference between the two types of realization is significant. Generally, the greater the power of a particular role in a social practice, the more often the agents who fulfil that role will be represented as intentional, as people who can decide to act on the world and succeed in this.

In the case of *means-orientation*, the purpose is constructed as 'in the action', and the action as a means to an end. The formula is then either *'I achieve doing (or being, or having) y by x-ing'*, which leaves the agency intact, and uses circumstances of means with 'by', 'by means of', 'through' etc., or *'X-ing serves to achieve being (or doing, or having) y'*, which does not. Two examples of each:

> Children cope with these difficulties by keeping the two worlds apart and never talking about home at school or mentioning school at home.

> The skilful teacher can save the new entrant's face by showing herself to be on his side.

Formal group time is a powerful mechanism for social control.

The key to a smooth transition lies in avoiding the shock of anything sudden in the way of sights, sounds or experiences.

A number of sub-categories are described in Van Leeuwen (2000), for instance the category of *use*, where the purposeful action is represented as a tool to achieve a goal:

Registration can also be used to encourage children to respond to their own names and learn each others'.

Another subcategory focuses on the *potential* of specific actions for serving specific purposes and uses clauses with 'facilitating' processes such as 'allow', 'promote', 'help', 'teach', 'build', 'facilitate', etc. in which the purposeful action is subject and the purpose object or complement, for instance:

It helps her to develop her sense of time.

Effect orientation, finally, emphasizes the outcome of actions. Here purposefulness is looked at from the other end, as something that turned out to exist in hindsight, rather than as something that was, or could have been, planned beforehand. Those involved might be able to predict the outcome, but they cannot fully bring it about through their own actions. In this case there is no identity between the agent of the action whose purpose is to be constructed, and the agent of the action that constitutes the purpose itself. Instead of a goal, as in the first of the examples below, or a means, as in the second, the purpose is the outcome of an action, as in the third example (the first two examples are made up). Typically this is expressed by result clauses with 'so that', 'that way', etc.

Your child has to learn to control aggressiveness, so as to be accepted by others.

Your child will be accepted by others by learning to control aggressiveness.

Your child has to learn to control aggressiveness, so others accept him.

In a second sub-category, the case of 'effect', the purposeful action itself is the agent or initiator of the purpose action.

Sending children away from home at an early age builds character.

Establishing the same routine going to and from school will make your child feel secure.

THEORETICAL RATIONALIZATION

In the case of theoretical rationalization, legitimation is grounded, not in whether the action is morally justified or not, nor in whether it is purposeful or effective, but in whether it is founded on some kind of truth, on 'the way things are'. Theoretical rationalization is therefore closely related to the category of naturalization which I discussed earlier. But where naturalizations simply state that some practice or action is 'natural', theoretical legitimations provide explicit representations of 'the way things are'.

Typically theoretical legitimation takes one of three forms. The first is that of the *definition*, in which one activity is defined in terms of another, moralized activity. For a definition to be a definition, both activities must be objectivated and generalized, and the link between them must either be attributive ('is', 'constitutes', etc.) or significative ('means', 'signals', 'symbolizes', etc.). In the examples below, 'necessary' hints at a utilitarian, and 'growing up' at an adult, 'reality principle'-oriented discourse of values.

> Transition is a necessary stage in the young child's experience.

> School signals that her children are growing up.

Such statements either function as a kind of axiom, referring forwards to the more detailed activities to which they are hyponymically related, or as a conclusion, referring backwards to the activities they summarize.

In the case of the *explanation*, it is not the practice which is defined or characterized, but one or more of the actors involved in the practice. Here the answer to the 'why' question is, 'because doing things this way is appropriate to the nature of these actors'. Generality is again essential. Explanations describe general attributes or habitual activities of the categories of actors in question. In the case of the 'first day at school', many of the parents' activities are legitimized by reference to lay or expert forms of child psychology. Parents use the same way to school each day because 'small children thrive on routine'. They stay calm and composed because 'children read their parents' distress so readily'.

A final form of theoretical legitimation takes the form of *predictions*. Although predictions have a ring of authority about them, they are meant to be based, not on authority, but on expertise, and they can therefore be denied by contrary experience, at least in principle. An example:

> Don't worry if you or your child cries. It won't last long.

Berger and Luckmann have distinguished between 'experiential' and 'scientific' rationalizations. Experiential rationalizations they describe as 'various explanatory schemes relating sets of objective meanings', and they add that 'these schemes are highly pragmatic, directly related to concrete actions', and that 'proverbs, moral maxims and wise sayings are common on this level' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 112). Like moral evaluations, they function as commonsense knowledge, regardless of whether they originate in theoretical rationalizations or not, but they are more explicitly formulated, and therefore more open to debate, albeit it in experiential and anecdotal, rather than in scientific terms.

'Scientific rationalizations' are the 'differentiated bodies of knowledge' that are developed to legitimate specific institutions. They not only include modern science but also other systematic bodies of knowledge that are used to legitimate institutional practices, for instance religions.

> Such legitimations form fairly comprehensive frames of reference for the respective sectors of institutionalized conduct. Because of their complexity and differentiation they are frequently entrusted to specialized personnel who transmit them through formalized initiation procedures. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 112)

As my examples have shown, psychology is, today, one of these specialized institutions for the production of discourses that can 'explain' the nature of social actors and legitimize social practices, one of the institutions that inform the 'changing popular syntheses of isolated items of scientific information' (Habermas, 1976: 80) used by the media and other forms of public communication to legitimize a range of social practices. Because of this mediation, psychologists and other creators of legitimatory discourses, can remain at arm's length of the legitimatory uses of their work, and often it is only in hindsight that the connections between scientific discourses and institutionalized social practices can be clearly perceived, as for instance in the case of the now discredited forms of anthropology that used to legitimize the institutionalization of colonial practices.

Figure 3 summarizes the essential categories of rationalization legitimation.

Mythopoesis

Legitimation can also be achieved through storytelling. In *moral tales*, protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practices, or restoring the legitimate order. In stories about going to school for the first time, for instance, children must face the trauma of leaving the security of home, but then, after negotiating a number of obstacles, they overcome this trauma and experience a happy ending of one kind or another:

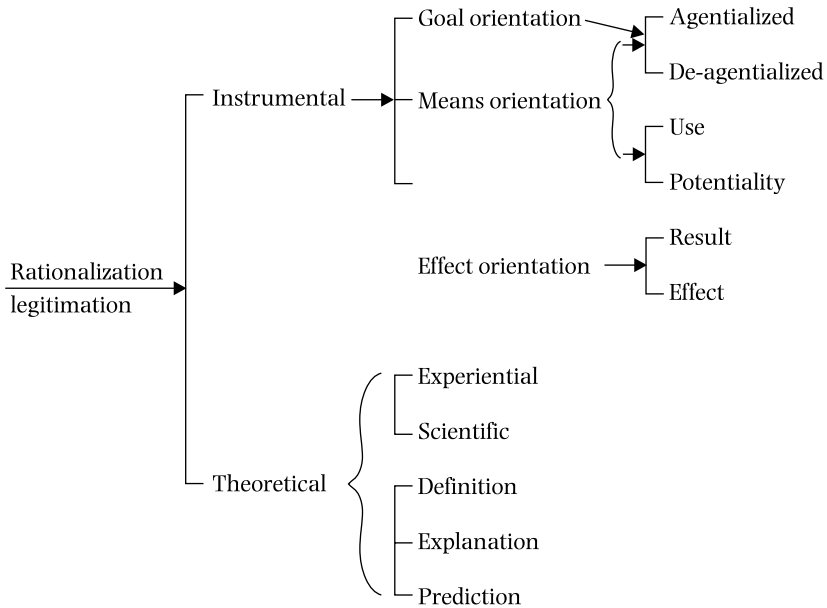'It-was-such-fun-we-had-milk-and-I-knew-a-bird,' gasped Mandy all in one breath.

FIGURE 3. *Types of rationalization legitimation*

'Yes, I enjoyed it too,' said Mark as they walked home telling of all that happened at their first day at school. They would always remember it.

No wonder there had been so many voices cheering her on. The whole family had come with Daddy to see Mary Kate win her first race.

Cautionary tales, on the other hand, convey what will happen if you do not conform to the norms of social practices. Their protagonists engage in deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings.

In the stories quoted above 'going to school for the first time' is represented in a fairly straightforward way, but in many other stories the actors and/or actions are inverted in terms of specific semantic features. A common inversion in 'going to school for the first time' stories is the inversion of the semantic feature 'human': an animal rather than a child goes to school, and then turns out to be unable to reap the benefits of education. We already encountered the monkey who could not 'reach a nut someone had thrown him'. In another story, the protagonist takes a lion to school, inverting his name to 'Noil':

The teacher wrote the name down in the register: NOIL. Then she finished calling the register.

'Betty Small,' she said.

'Yes,' said the little girl.

'Noil,' said the teacher.

'Yes,' said the lion. He mumbled, opening his mouth as little as possible so that the teacher should not see his teeth as sharp as skewers and knives. He did not swish his tail. He did not growl. He sat next to the little girl, as good as gold.

As in the earlier example, compulsory schooling is legitimized as an evolutionary, and in this case perhaps also civilizing, process. The child moves from being at one with animals to a higher stage, where animals cannot follow, and the animal's failure to understand, or to comply with the rules of school, confirms this. As in the stories of many other cultures, 'the diversity of species is used as a conceptual support for social differentiation' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 174).

Stories may also use symbolic actions, specific actions that can nevertheless represent more than one domain of institutionalized social practice, and so provide a 'mythical model of social action' (Wright, 1975: 188). In one children's story, for instance, the protagonist, Magnus, meets a character called the Unknown Soldier. Together they end up in a room where adults are sitting in benches, and where a 'man with the large moustache' orders them to complete a series of tests. The Unknown Soldier fails miserably at this task and Magnus is not allowed to help him. In the end Magnus is ordered to leave, and, despite vigorous protest, must leave his friend, the Unknown Soldier, behind. Clearly this story represents not just schooling, but all domains where anonymous people are compelled to spend their days locked up in rooms, engaged in meaningless tasks, and in which they must forgo solidarity and compete with each other, so that some may succeed and others fail. Just as fairy tales distance their readers from the actuality of their subject matter in far away places and long ago times, so this story distances its

readers from the naturalistic specifics of institutions such as the army, the factory, the office and the school, to allow the de-legitimation of all these domains and of the principles of social organization that underlie them.

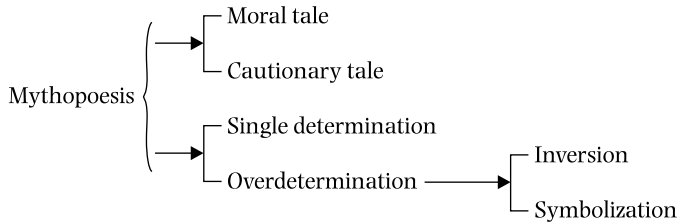Figure 4 summarizes the key categories of mythopoesis.

```
                              ┌─ Moral tale
                    ┌──►
                    │         └─ Cautionary tale
Mythopoesis  {
                    │         ┌─ Single determination
                    └──►                                      ┌─ Inversion
                              └─ Overdetermination ──►
                                                              └─ Symbolization
```

FIGURE 4. *Types of mythopoesis*

Multimodal legitimation

Though language plays the central role in legitimation, some forms of legitimation can also be expressed visually, or even musically. Stories, for instance, can be told visually, in the form of comic strips, movies and games. Role models can be shown as engaged in activities that need legitimation. And moral evaluations can be connoted visually or represented by visual symbols. Figure 5 depicts an episode that occurs in almost all 'going to school for the first time' children's stories, the 'coat-rack episode'. This episode is often used to portray the child's initial dismay at finding herself one amongst many, rather than a unique individual. For this reason the coat-hooks are often individualized with the child's name or with her own, personal picture. In Figure 5 an element is added to the basic representation of the episode, the teddy bear in the left bottom corner. The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1971: 2) has described teddy bears as 'transitional objects' to which the child transfers affection as it moves from a stage of 'oral eroticism' into a 'growing ability to recognize and accept reality'. As a result teddy bears have come to symbolize affection in a wide range of contexts (Caldas-Coulthard and Van Leeuwen, 2003) and can legitimize schooling by suggesting that school is not an impersonal and de-personalizing institution, but allows at least a modicum of affection and a small acknowledgement of the child's 'oral erotic' past.

In a brochure for parents a young girl poses in her new uniform, a little anxiously, perhaps. The strong presence of a well-lit, large fern in the background adds a hint of the 'natural', and of the idea of 'growth' to the regimental connotations of the uniform.

In audiovisual texts, music may accompany the representation of social practices, and this too can add moral evaluation legitimation. The film *Blackhawk Down* (2002, director: Ridley Scott) opens with a scene, shot in bluish monochrome, of a man wrapping a corpse. The scene is intercut with title cards telling the story of the Somalian famine of 1992, and explaining its causes. The scene is accompanied by lamenting music mixed in with the sound of wind. The final title reads: 'In late August, America's elite soldiers, Delta Force, Army Rangers

FIGURE 5. *Daniel shows Anna where to hang her coat*

and the 160th SOAR are sent to Mogadishu to remove Aidid and restore order'. At this point the sound of a helicopter mixes in with the lamenting music and soon the music becomes energetic, optimistic in its tonality and militaristic in its instrumentation. Thus images of the famine are accompanied by a musical discourse of victimhood, and images of the arrival of the American troops by music with heroic connotations.

Legitimation and context

Gunther Kress's analysis (1985: 15–17) of a speech by Helen Caldicott at a large anti-nuclear rally in Sydney powerfully demonstrates the contemporary proliferation of legitimation discourses. He shows that a single text can invoke many different, sometimes even contradictory, discourses: 'medical, Christian, populist, (Jungian) psychiatric, patriotic, sentimental/parental, romantic, patriarchal, technological, prophetic, feminist' (p. 17):

> The traces of these different discourses are evident enough; they have not been closely integrated by the writer/speaker into anything like a seamless text: the discursive differences are not resolved. Consequently the text is unlikely to provide that definitional impulse which would act to give unity to the diverse groups which had assembled that day to hear this speech. Although the text is that of a single writer the contention of the different discourses is clearly evident, so much so in fact that it has been beyond the writer's ability to control that difference. (p. 17)

Viewing these discourses as legitimation discourses can add a further dimension, as the concept of legitimation can link, on the one hand, social practices, and on the other hand, discourses of value. Consider for instance the 'patriotic' segment of Caldicott's speech:

> Thank you, thank you fellow Australians. You're a great country. [loud clapping and shouts] This is the best country in the world. [clapping]. And that's why we have an enormous responsibility because we have to lead the earth to survival, and it's Australia that started it fourteen years ago with the French tests. It was us who took the lead to take the French to the court of Justice at The Hague, to discipline her. And now she tests underground, and it was marches like this that stopped the French blowing up bombs in the Pacific. When I tell the Americans what the Australians did about the French tests they all stand up and cheer [clapping, yells].

A legitimation analysis of this segment will on the one hand separate out the actors, actions and so on from the reactions, purposes and legitimations, but on the other hand also show how these two aspects of the text, the representations and the interpretations, one could say, are related – in Table 1 this is done by means of aligning the legitimations with the actions and/or actors they legitimize.

The left hand columns of Table 1 reconstruct the activity sequence that underlies the text, though agency and sequence are not entirely clear: have the French been stopped by the marching, by the Court in The Hague, or both? And in which order did these events occur? The right hand column shows the legitimations, which, as Kress notes, are quite diverse, even in this short segment: patriotic values are invoked as well as 'responsibility' and 'survival' discourses.

In a second excerpt from the Caldicott speech, the discourses are perhaps, in Kress's terms, 'prophetic', 'romantic' and 'sentimental/parental':

> Will man evolve spiritually and emotionally enough … and women, to know that we can't fight and we have to live together in peace. If we can't we'll blow up the world and you and I will know that in our lifetime. Before we die, we will know whether the

TABLE 1. *Aligning legitimations with the actions and/or actors they legitimize*

Actors	Actions	Reactions	Purposes	Legitimations
the French	blow up bombs in the Pacific ↓			
the Australians	take French to the Court of Justice in The Hague ~		to discipline her	(a) evaluations of 'Australians': *great, best in the world, fantastic people*
the Australians	stopped French by marching ↓			(b) moralized activities: *have responsibility,*
the French	test underground			*lead earth to survival*
the Americans		cheer		

> human race can do it or not. If we die in a nuclear holocaust, we'll know we failed. If we die of natural causes in our lifetime, we'll definitely know that we succeeded. You can do nothing less with your life than this ... to give everything up for the planet. And even if you fail, as the bomb goes off, you can die with a clear conscience. But it makes the earth so precious and I really and truly believe that the people of the earth are rising up and the politicians will have to stand aside and give us what we want. We want the earth to continue and we want to live; and have children and life to go on for evermore ...

The 'prophetic' element is contained in the activity sequence itself, as it unfolds two scenarios for the future, a doom scenario in which 'the politicians (will) blow up the world' and a scenario of hope, in which they will 'stand aside'. The discourses that legitimize the scenario of hope again vary: discourses of sacrifice and 'conscience' mix with discourses in which 'life', 'the human race' and 'the earth' are the ultimate values (Table 2).

Clearly it is true, as Kress writes, that 'the discursive differences are not resolved' and that, in terms of these discourses, 'the text is unlikely to provide that definitional impulse which would act to give unity to the diverse groups which had assembled that day.' We are divided in terms of discourse, and as a result, legitimation, insofar as it is grounded, however obliquely, in moral discourses rather than in authority, is in crisis. On the other hand, the participants in this rally, discursively divided as they may have been, were united in what they were actually doing. They all participated in the same practice – attending the rally, and demonstrating against nuclear arms.

Does this provide a starting point for a new, common morality, a morality centred on actions rather than beliefs? Or does it signal a devaluation of beliefs, turning ideas, moral or otherwise, into products on the supermarket shelf, essentially identical, but differently branded so as to allow consumers to express their lifestyle identities and marketers to sell their products as widely as possible? Whatever may be the case, it is clear that in the matter of legitimation we face a

TABLE 2.

Actors	Actions		Legitimations
the human race/we	[protest against nuclear arms]		moralized activity: *give everything for the planet, evolve spiritually and emotionally* (discourse of sacrifice?)
	↓		
politicians	blow up the world	stand aside & [disarm]	
	↓	↓	
	die	live in peace	
the human race/we		have children	*clear conscience*
		↓	
		die of natural causes	moralized activities: *the earth continues; life goes on for evermore*

choice between morality and authority. And it is equally clear that in reflecting on the crisis of legitimation, we need to consider not just legitimation, but also and especially the intricate interconnections between social practices and the discourses that legitimize them.

NOTE

1.   A preliminary version of the descriptive framework presented here was included in Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999).

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