LITERACY AND RELIGION
STUDIES IN WRITTEN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

EDITORS

BRIAN STREET  
University of Sussex

LUDO VERHOEVEN  
Tilburg University

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

FLORIAN COULMAS  
Chuo University, Tokyo

DANIEL WAGNER  
University of Pennsylvania

EDITORIAL BOARD

F. Niyi Akinnaso (Temple University, Philadelphia)  
David Barton (Lancaster University)  
Paul Bertelson (Université Libre de Bruxelles)  
Claire Blanche-Benveniste (Université de Provence)  
Chander J. Daswani (India Council of Educational Research and Training)  
Emilia Ferreiro (Instituto Politecnico México)  
Edward French (University of the Witwatersrand)  
Uta Frith (Medical Research Council, London)  
Harvey J. Graff (University of Texas at Dallas)  
Hartmut Günther (Max Planck Institut für Psycholinguistik, Nijmegen)  
David Olson (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto)  
Clotilde Pontecorvo (University of Rome)  
Roger Säljo (Linköping University)  
Michael Stubbs (Universität Trier)

AIM AND SCOPE

The aim of this series is to advance insight into the multifaceted character of written language, with special emphasis on its uses in different social and cultural settings. It combines interest in sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic accounts of the acquisition and transmission of literacy. The series focusses on descriptive and theoretical reports in areas such as language codification, cognitive models of written language use, written language acquisition in children and adults, the development and implementation of literacy campaigns, and literacy as a social marker relating to gender, ethnicity, and class. The series is intended to be multi-disciplinary, combining insights from linguistics, psychology, sociology, education, anthropology, and philosophy.

Volume 2

Cushla Kapitzke

Literacy and Religion
LITERACY AND RELIGION

THE TEXTUAL POLITICS AND PRACTICE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM

CUSHLA KAPITZKE

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA
Permission was given by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to undertake this study. However, results and conclusions drawn therefrom are entirely the author's, and are not necessarily agreed to or accepted by the Murrayville S.D.A. Church.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, for permission to reproduce the photograph on page 106 from their book, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: A Denominational History Textbook for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes,* by R.W. Schwarz, (1979), Boise ID: Pacific Press.
To Ross and Allan

For Santina
whose ways and words
inspired me
to write this book
but whose life ended
before its completion.
See you in the morning.
Contents

List of Figures and Tables ix
Preface xiii

Chapter 1
Literacy and Religion as Social and Discursive Practices 1

Chapter 2
Holy Word and Holy Writ: Literacy and Christianity in History 22

Chapter 3
The Seventh-day Adventist Church: Historical and Institutional Background 55

Chapter 4
Riverside Seventh-day Adventist Church: A Contextual Description 93

Chapter 5
The Sabbath: Theological Construction of the Adventist Literate 123

Chapter 6
The Inner Circle: Familial Construction of the Adventist Literate 174

Chapter 7
School and Scripture: Educational Construction of the Adventist Literate 217

Chapter 8
Meditation and Mediation: The Politics of Religious Literacies 259

Appendices 287
References 317
Author Index 334
Subject Index 338
## List of Figures and Tables

### Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Major occupations of Murrayville population</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Categories and values of ABC trade stock (June 30, 1991)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introductory elements from teacher's edition of adult Sabbath school lesson (Jan-Mar., 1990:102)</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Transcript of children's story: “Sunburn and the Scriptures”</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Story from Junior devotional text: “God’s Little Chicken” July 24</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Uses of literacy in Heath’s (1986) Trackton and Roadville communities</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Content analysis of two Seventh-day Adventist Advanced Reading Program texts</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist Church administrative departments and their functions</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>List of book titles by E. G. White</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Twenty-seven fundamentals of Seventh-day Adventist belief</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Offices proposed by Riverside Church nominating committee (1990)</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Facsimile of standard adult Sabbath lesson pamphlet (1994: 48-49, Apr-Jun.)</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Transcript of sermon: “Authority, rebellion, and service”</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>List of character traits fostered in preschool program text, The Ladder of Life (1977)</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Philosophy and objectives of Seventh-day Adventist education (Philosophy and objectives. 1991, South Pacific Division, Dpt. of Education)</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H: Objectives of language component of Murrayville curriculum document</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I: Objectives of reading component of Murrayville curriculum document</td>
<td>313</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J: Transcript of school lesson: “God’s health laws”</td>
<td>314</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And Pilate said to him, "What is truth?". (John 18:38)

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)

Truth isn't outside power . . . truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(Foucault in Gordon, 1980:131)
Preface

Most studies of communal literacy to date have been apolitical ethnographic or sociolinguistic descriptions of the forms and features of culturally specific textual and interpretive practice. These have provided important insights into the uses and functions of reading and writing in various social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Nonetheless, an emphasis on literacy as a neutral communicative technology, as a medium for the inter- and cross-generational reproduction of cultural content and world-view, is both limited and limiting.

Reading and writing entail more than the mechanistic production and comprehension of letter/sound combinations stored in the minds of individuals. I argue here that reading and writing are located social and cultural practices, occurring in specific historical, geographic, economic, and institutional sites, and thus cannot adequately be conceptualised in terms of cognitive “skills” or “processes” acquired independently of the beliefs, values, interests, and relations of those who teach and learn them (cf. Baker & Luke, 1991). People don’t read and write for the sake of doing so, but to meet needs, to serve interests, and to achieve goals. Literate work is purposeful and productive, and hence, is intrinsically political. It does things to people, as well as for people. Particular literacies not only utilise different technologies, but they institute different rules and conventions governing their use. These, in turn, generate distinctive textual artefacts and yield specific social outcomes. Within particular cultural and subcultural sites, selective traditions of usage comprising ideologies, discourses, canons, genres, and events produce certain social outcomes for certain social groups (Williams, 1989). These distribute and confer differential positions, functions, and powers to individuals in proportion to their mastery of the discourses and practices valorised by communal textual and literate economies. People in print cultures know and “read” the world, and hence the word, through different relations of power established largely by cultures of text. Whether directed inwardly toward the
self or outwardly towards others, reading and writing are actions that are intrinsically political.

From a poststructuralist perspective, human language and communication are social phenomena and, as part of the semiosis of communication, reading and writing are social and cultural practices. What does this mean, and how does it relate to or explain the genesis and scope of this monograph? The social activity generating the reading and writing examined in this book is religious belief and practice. Across time periods and cultures with access to the written word, the exercise of religious faith has been linked closely to the production, organisation, maintenance, and circulation of both submerged and dominant forms of textual practices, their social processes and effects. Despite the central roles played by law, economy, and administration, religion provides one of the best instances of the continuities and contradictions in the nearly three millennia of Western alphabetic literacy (Graff, 1987:10).

The three aforegoing quotations frame this treatise. Yet, how does the notion of “truth” connect with an investigation of the relationship between literacy and religion? In the second and third passages, placed as responses to the inquiry made, it seems, even by hard-headed Roman procurators, a Nazarene heretic and a French historian present two opposing viewpoints on the idea of “truth”. One claims that truth “sets free”; The other argues that “regimes of truth” position, constrain, normalise, and exclude. Each of the social domains studied by the historian, Michel Foucault, (i.e., psychology, psychiatry, penalty, medical science, epistemology, and education) claims to liberate the human subject from something: for example, from the bondage of mental or physical illness, from ignorance, or from the detrimental conduct of deviants and criminals. Theology too claims to liberate the child of God from the burden of sin, guilt, and eventual, inevitable, and eternal death. Sanctioned and sanctified knowledges, embodied and articulated in sacred texts such as the Christian Scriptures, the Islamic Qur’an, and the Hindu Vedas, are the sources and sites of these assertions or “truths”. Believers view the “truths” of these canonical texts as universal and absolute, as immutable and inviolable standards for human belief and behaviour.

---
1. For the purposes of this book, I capitalise the term “God” when referring to the personal god of the Christian Bible. Following most Christian discursive practice — though not that of radical feminist scholars (cf. Daly, 1973; Fiorenza, 1983; Ruether, 1983) — I also use the gendered (male) pronominal forms of “God”: “he”, “his”, and “him”. Unlike this tradition though, I do not capitalise these words.
However, the faithful are known and accepted as members of religious communities not only through compliance to systems of beliefs, but also through conformity to cultural patterns of textual and interpretive practice. Therefore, a theory of the politics of truth production, its social processes and effects, is an integral component of an investigation of religious literacy. The aim of this book is not to argue that one of the above views on truth is right and the other is wrong. It is not to show that the rules and routines, doxas and dogmas of religious systems either oppress or release believers. Nor is it to debate the objectives, functions, or efficacy of the “apparatuses” and “political economies of [religious] truths”. Rather, its aim is to contribute to the growing field of literacy studies by probing the complex social, institutional, ideological, and political dimensions of reading and writing connected with communal religious practice in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Recent re-theorisations of language, discourse, knowledge, truth, power, and politics taken from social theory and critical linguistics are particularly germane to this undertaking. Religious movements, bodies, institutions, and cultures serve particular social and ideological agendas and functions. They are inherently political because what people take to be true or false is always located within a political field. Consequently, my focus here is the sociological operation and effect of religiosity, as it is exercised through literacy. For the purpose of the book, I conceptualise religion as both a mode and product of power/knowledge relations, constructed and sustained through spoken and written language. The question I address is how human beings construct and govern themselves and others through the production, administration, and dissemination of religious truth encoded in text. I examine how regimes of religious rationality constitute rules, reasons, procedures, and practices for being, believing, and behaving in the social world. This entails understanding how human beings are formed as both subjects and objects of religious action and knowledge by virtue of their location in particular historical moments, cultural discourses, geographical locations, institutional sites, and community networks.

The book is structured in two main parts. The first part consists of an historical overview of the shifting interrelation of diversity in literacies and religious belief. Bearing in mind that literate practices need to be contextualised within historical, cultural, political, and institutional contexts, Chapter One examines key convergences of literacy and religion in the historical discourse of Western Christendom. It provides a critical narrative
description of the dominant recorded forms of literacy and religion ranging from preliterate (oral) practice to Western literacies of the early nineteenth century. The second part consists of an ethnographic description and analysis of the literate practices of Riverside Seventh-day Adventist community. Chapter Three introduces this narrative with the provision of historical and institutional background to the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Each of the four subsequent chapters examines particular sites and domains of that subculture, which generate and sustain textual and literate conventions. These domains of cultural training and teaching are the church, the family, and the church school. The closing chapter uses the discourse of Adventism to draw some general comments on the features of religious literacies, and the politics and contradictions of its mediation and interpretation.

Simply put, this book provides a sustained analysis of the reciprocal social construction of literacy, religiosity, and subjectivity in one Seventh-day Adventist Church community of Northern Australia. Before proceeding, I wish to acknowledge here the unbounded cooperation and assistance of Riverside Seventh-day Adventist Church community, who bore steadfastly with my endless, and sometimes seemingly pointless, probing. This working relationship was also complicated by the unusual circumstance that I was not only a researcher of that community, but also a member.

Brodkey (1987b) calls attention to the unacceptable confounding of “experience and story” that occurs with the third-person narrative of the ethnographic present, asserting that authors need to lay bare their personal voices and ideologies by exposing the construction of their positions as narrators. Foregrounding the self as writer through interruption in the flow of the narrative reduces the positioning of readers by dispelling the notion that the writing constitutes “objective” truth conveyed through the neutral medium of language. As both member and researcher of that community, it is particularly important that my subject and speaking positions be made visible. Hence, notwithstanding the view that autobiographical discursions in the preface to a book indicate that the author is taking her/himself too seriously, I digress here to defend that dual position and to discuss its consequent advantages, disadvantages, and dilemmas.

Critical narrators are self-conscious about ideology, claiming that all stories including their own are told from a vantage point. Hence, I candidly acknowledge that my encounter with this community, the forms and processes of cultural and discursive hegemony that I perceived in it, are just that: