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Review of *Mediated discourse: The nexus of practice*.  
*London: Routledge* by Ron Scollon

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**RON SCOLLON, *Mediated Discourse: The Nexus of Practice*. London: Routledge, 2001. ix + 182 pp. US \$100.00, ISBN 0-415-24882-5 (hbk). US \$29.95, ISBN 0-415-24883-3 (pbk)**

What I like very much about this book is that it epitomizes the notion of qualitative research. It is a beautifully written exploration of the way mediated discourse gets accomplished, but it also clarifies ways of analyzing discourse with rich discussions of theory and analysis based on a number of illustrations taken from everyday events. Scollon explores an everyday practice that most people probably take for granted, and he proposes a way of examining this 'practice' in a new way. This practice is 'handing', and it serves as the centerpiece of this book. We 'hand' books to each other, we hand coffee cups, we hand pillows, we hand babies, we hand money. This exploration of handing centers on first language acquisition data; Scollon finds that 'handing' is itself a part of larger, more complex practices. As a 'smaller' practice, handing aggregates with other practices into a constellation that Scollon calls a *nexus of practice*.

Chapter One, 'Mediated discourse theory', show us ways of linking 'discourse analysis that operates without reference to social actions . . . and social analysis that operates without reference to discourse on the other' (p. 1). Chapter Two, 'On the ontogenesis of a social practice', proposes and achieves a longitudinal description of how a young child develops the social practice of handing (from one-year-old to a little more than two-years-old over the course of the study). Chapter Three, 'On the ontogenesis of a social actor', explores the change of the young child from a baby who 'gets construed' as a social actor by her caregivers to someone who develops the ability to be a social actor herself. In Chapter Four, 'Objects as mediational means', Scollon argues that mediational means (such as handing) 'predate the user; that is, they arrive in the life of the person as "givens"' (p. 116). Herein, Scollon replaces the 10 characteristics of mediational means that Wertsch (1998) develops, presenting four characteristics that both refine and expand upon Wertsch and adding a fifth one of his own (pp. 120-1).

Chapter Five, 'The nexus of practice', is devoted to 'the problem of identity as it is related to social action, practice, and habitus' (p. 142). In other words, Scollon discusses how the young child in the study 'come[s] to be identified and ultimately to claim an identity for herself as a social actor within a nexus or within multiple nexus of practice' (p. 147). The discussion is predicated on the notion that it is better not to think of occurrences like 'gift exchange' or 'buying a cup of coffee' as practices in and of themselves; instead, they should be conceived of as being made up of other practices depending on the situation. Scollon therefore says that 'gift exchange' and 'buying a cup of coffee' are nexus of practice, with handing playing a role in both of these 'network[s] of linked practices' (p. 147). Chapter Six, 'Mediated discourse as a nexus of practice', recaps the main arguments from earlier chapters, but it also presents problems with the notion of nexus of practice that Scollon claims are important for us to consider in future studies: namely, the problems of agency, representation, multimodal discourse, and social structures such as institutions, organizations, nations, and cultures (p. 168).

As a reader, I appreciate the fact that Scollon incorporates the problems he sees with his ideas; he readily explores these weaknesses and calls for other researchers to help clarify and refine what we find in his work. What I myself hope to see as a result of this book is a concerted effort to explore the fourth problem that Scollon articulates: social structures like institutions, organizations, nations, and cultures. These areas of study will indeed prove difficult to explore at the microlevel of 'handing'. For example, question-and-answer sequences found in institutional discourse should be re-examined. Does the

practice of questioning actually consist of a number of practices? Should 'questioning' be rechristened a nexus of practice?

One further potential complication for research is the fact that Scollon explores nexus of practice in child language acquisition. However, it is often the case that adults become members of speech communities and/or communities of practice without necessarily learning the practices of that community as children; in other words, they learn these practices after language acquisition is largely complete. How, for example, might scholars now approach the notion of ethnic minorities who as adolescents or adults enter into majority cultures and institutions? Scollon sets the bar very high for us with this new text. I think it is a challenge worth taking up.

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