# LITERACY, EMOTION, AND AUTHORITY

## READING AND WRITING ON A POLYNESIAN ATOLL

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# CONTENTS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *List of illustrations and tables* | *page* x |
| | *Acknowledgments* | xi |
| | *Transcription conventions and orthography* | xiii |
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | The ethnographic context | 21 |
| 3 | The domains of reading and writing | 52 |
| 4 | Letter writing and reading | 72 |
| 5 | Letters, economics, and emotionality | 93 |
| 6 | Between literacy and orality: the sermon | 116 |
| 7 | Literacy, truth, and authority | 140 |
| 8 | Conclusion | 169 |
| | *Notes* | 188 |
| | *References* | 204 |
| | *Index of Tuvaluan words* | 226 |
| | *General index* | 228 |

# ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

**Figures**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Nukulaelae Atoll | *page* 25 |
| 2 | The swamp taro pit | 27 |
| 3 | The maneapa | 33 |
| 4 | Ship day: dignitaries arriving on the launch | 75 |
| 5 | Ship day: gathering for news and letters | 78 |
| 6 | The church building | 156 |

**Maps**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The Central Pacific | 22–3 |
| 2 | Nukulaelae | 24 |

**Tables**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Grapheme inventory | xvi |
| 2 | Origins of letters in the corpus | 80 |

# I
# INTRODUCTION

## Anthropological perspectives on literacy

Literacy has occupied a central position in the historical development of anthropological thought. During the formative decades of the field and its allied disciplines, literacy was implicated, more or less explicitly, as a determinant of differences between "civilized" and "primitive" thought and action (Durkheim and Mauss 1903, Maine 1873, McLennan 1876, Tylor 1874), scientific mentalities and prelogical thinking (Cassirer 1946, Lévy-Bruhl 1910, Luria 1976), open and closed systems (Popper 1959), *pensée domestiquée* and *pensée sauvage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962), and context-free and context-bound cognitive processes (Vygotsky 1962). Until the turn of the twentieth century, pointing to literacy as the pivot between "us" and "them" was a relatively simple task: literacy was defined as a more or less exclusive feature of Western life. Where it existed in the non-Western world, it had characteristics that gave it an inferior quality: for example, it was thought that learning to read and write in China required years of apprenticeship because of the apparently complex and unwieldy nature of the writing system. Similarly, in much of the Islamic world, literacy was described as being in the exclusive hands of a social élite, which prevented it from giving rise to an enlightened society. Only in the West, early anthropologists maintained, did literacy reach its apogee and thus enable the "general improvement of mankind by higher organization of the individual and of society, to the end of promoting at once man's goodness, power, and happiness," as Tylor defined the rise to "civilization" (1874:1:27).

While modern anthropologists, for the most part, eschew the overarching determinism of their nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century predecessors, the contrast between literacy and pre-literacy remains a major preoccupation in contemporary anthropological theory. The historical persistence of this nineteenth-century preoccupation is hardly unique among questions of concern to the field: as Kuper (1988) demonstrates, major patterns of continuity over time underlie anthropological thinking on many issues, despite cosmetic changes in how they are approached.

Many contemporary scholars, among whom Jack Goody figures prominently (1968, 1977, 1986, 1987, Goody and Watt 1963), have continued to maintain that the historical advent of literacy plays a crucial role in bringing about fundamental changes in the makeup of culture, society, and the person, and that cross-cultural differences in modes of thought can be attributed to the presence of literacy in some societies, and its absence elsewhere. Goody, whose stance has become significantly more tentative and mitigated with each restatement (Halverson 1992), originally took to task the contrasts that previous scholars had proposed between, for example, domesticated and undomesticated thought. Criticizing the dichotomies that had been advanced earlier for their lack of explanatory power, Goody proposed to demonstrate that "many of the valid aspects of these somewhat vague dichotomies can be related to changes in the mode of communication, especially the introduction of various forms of writing" (1977:16). This deterministic view of literacy and its subsequent restatements represent what has come to be referred to as the *autonomous model* of literacy (Street 1984).[1] The persistent popularity of the model across different traditions of inquiry demonstrates that it strikes a particularly enduring chord in Western thinking.

According to early versions of the autonomous model, certain inherent properties of literacy, particularly alphabetic literacy,[2] cause basic changes in the structure of societies, the makeup of cultures, and the nature of individuals. (In subsequent versions, the word "cause" is replaced by "facilitate," "make possible," or "encourage," but the basic tenets of the model remain largely unchanged.) For example, writing enables its users to keep permanent records that can be subjected to critical scrutiny, in contrast to orally transmitted information, which is inherently ephemeral and unreliable. As a result, writing gives rise to (or facilitates) standards of historical and scientific verifiability and concomitant social designs. Similarly, bureaucratic institutions and complex state structures depend crucially on the type of long-distance communication that literacy makes possible. While the emergence of literacy does not necessarily engender bureaucratic institutions, it greatly facilitates their work (Goody 1986). According to other versions of the model, bureaucracy cannot survive long without the presence of writing (see Larsen 1988 for a critical discussion).

Literacy is also said to alter individual psychological functions: a written text, particularly if written in an alphabetic script, is claimed to be less context-dependent than a comparable spoken text, and the ability to produce and process written texts presupposes (and hence gives rise to) context-free thinking. Literacy is also thought to affect memory in significant ways, as it makes possible rigorous recall of lengthy texts, compared to the imprecise, pattern-driven memory of pre-literate individuals. The central role that the autonomous model accords to literacy as a

causal (or, later, enabling) factor thus helps to *explain* the differences between pre-literate and literate individuals, societies, and cultures that earlier researchers had described but not explained (Goody 1977).[3]

The premises and claims of the autonomous model have been subjected to severe critical scrutiny by researchers in a variety of fields, including social anthropology (Street 1984), sociolinguistics (Heath 1983), cultural psychology (Scribner and Cole 1981), rhetoric (Pattison 1982), folklore (Finnegan 1988) and history (Clanchy 1993, Graff 1979, W. Harris 1989). For these critics, literacy should be viewed not as a monolithic phenomenon but as a multi-faceted one, whose meaning, including any consequences it may have for individuals, groups, or symbolic structures, is crucially tied to the social practices that surround it and to the ideological system in which it is embedded. Proponents of an *ideological model* (Street 1984, 1988, 1993) find highly suspect the uncanny resemblance between middle-class academic ways of viewing literacy in post-industrial societies and the social, cultural, and cognitive characteristics purported to be the consequences of literacy. They criticize the fact that proponents of the autonomous model invariably present these purported consequences as inherently superior to the characteristics of pre-literacy (while also romanticizing certain aspects of pre-literacy).[4] Advocates of the ideological perspective view literacy as a sociocultural construct, and propose that literacy cannot be studied independently of the social, political, and historical forces that shape it. They point out, for example, that literacy is found in many societies of the world that do not display the social and cognitive characteristics which the autonomous model predicts should accompany literacy. Proponents of the autonomous model have attempted to meet these objections by proposing that these cases are situations of *restricted literacy*, i.e., literacy which somehow has not reached its fullest potential (Goody 1968:11–20). However, these qualifications more or less explicitly equate non-restricted literacy with Western middle-class standards, and it is highly questionable whether any form of literacy is ever non-restricted in one way or another (see Chapter 8 for a fuller discussion).

The parameters of inquiry that the ideological model introduces into the discussion highlight the serious problems associated with the category "pre-literate society" that proponents of the autonomous model invoke unproblematically. Under what conditions should a group be considered to be literate? At what point in history can a society be considered to have made the transition from pre-literacy to literacy (cf. Howe 1992:74, O'Keefe 1990:190–4, Stock 1983:9)? If pre-literate societies are groups whose members do not individually control reading and writing skills, ambiguous cases abound. For example, does the category include communities in which a handful of writers act as "literacy brokers" for other members of the group, by writing letters, filling out bureaucratic

forms, and interpreting written directions for them (e.g., Weinstein-Shr 1993 on Hmong immigrants in the United States, Baynham 1993 on Moroccan immigrants in London, Wagner, Messick, and Spratt 1986 on Morocco)? How does one characterize communities in which men define women as "illiterate" despite the fact that women do read and write, because the type of literacy that women engage in is confined to the private world of the household, and hence remains invisible to men (e.g., Rockhill 1987 on urban Hispanic California)? Are groups that are the target of efforts by outsiders to make them literate, but whose majority resists these efforts, literate or not (e.g., E. Brandt 1983, Guss 1986, Leap 1991, Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith 1984, Scollon and Scollon 1981)? In each of these situations, the persons or groups in questions are familiar, sometimes intimately so, with the nature, purposes, and social evaluations of reading and writing. Yet they do not fall under the classic definition of "literate people." An adequate model of literacy must somehow capture this discrepancy, something which a narrow deterministic definition of literacy fails to do.

A cursory overview of the current state of the world indicates that most societies of the world in fact fall between the categorical cracks of the autonomous model. Today, it is highly doubtful that any community remains untouched by literacy, despite anthropologists' persistent invocation of the category "pre-literate society."[5] Political globalization, highly organized missionizing efforts that place literacy in the foreground of their endeavors, and the penetration of capitalism into the most remote corners of the globe have all contributed to the erasure from the ethnographic spectrum of groups that have never come into contact with reading and writing. Of course, the literacy experiences of various groups and persons can differ significantly, but where does one draw the line between literacy and pre-literacy? It is impossible, in today's world, to define the pre-literate condition without imposing a value-laden, a priori, and arbitrary standard for what it means for a person or group to be literate. And indeed, works of scholars likeWallerstein (1974) and Wolf (1982), which demonstrate that political and economic globalization is not a recent process, make one wonder about the historical reality of the pre-literate condition even in centuries past. The sobering examples of the spread of literacy into insular Southeast Asia several centuries before the rise of European and American hegemony over the area (Conklin 1949, 1991, Rafael 1988, Reid 1988) and of the multiple cases of "invented literacies" in various parts of the world (Harbsmeier 1988, Smalley, Vang, and Yang 1990) retrospectively call into question whether the "pre-literate society" as a category even existed in the early days of anthropology and other social sciences.[6]

The ideological reaction to autonomous approaches to literacy thus represents a call away from facile categorizations, a retreat from hasty

generalizations, and a return to the ethnographic drawing board. Underlying it is the belief that generalizations are much more likely to be discovered in the relationship between literacy and its sociocultural, political, and ideological context than in the inherent properties of literacy itself. The ideological model takes as its object of inquiry the diversity of literacy experiences that emerges within and across societies (cf. K. Basso 1974, Szwed 1981). Within societies, diversity may be tied to differences between contexts, to distinct religious traditions, or to patterns of inequality between groups. Across societies, the heterogeneity of literacy can result from a host of possible factors, including the nature of pedagogical practices tied to literacy, its origin and historical relationships, and the attitudinal underpinnings of reading and writing. Rather than seeking an overarching and context-free characterization of the cognitive and social consequences of literacy, proponents of the ideological model focus on the *activities*, *events*, and *ideological constructs* associated with particular manifestations of literacy.

## Ethnographic approaches to literacies

This book takes as its point of departure the premise that literacy is a fundamentally heterogeneous phenomenon, whose shape can be determined by many aspects of the sociocultural context in which it is embedded. The first aim of an ethnographically informed approach to literacy is descriptive: before claiming to understand the general meaning of literacy for a particular social group, one must characterize the range and diversity of literacy experiences and contextualize each one of them in its historical antecedents, its contemporary associations, and its links to other forms of literacy. Central problems for such an analysis include the question of who has access to what type of literacy, in what social context each literacy activity is learned and used, and what social values are foregrounded in the social context in which acts of reading and writing take place.

Two analytic concepts emerge as particularly important tools for the ethnographic investigation of literacy: *literacy event* and *literacy practice*. The concept of "literacy event" refers to a strip of social life in which literacy plays a central role, which can be broken down into its various components, such as settings, participants, and genres (Heath 1983:386).[7] The notion of "literacy practice" is grounded in several disciplinary traditions, including social theory (Bourdieu 1977), psychology (Lave 1988), history (de Certeau 1984), and anthropology (Ortner 1984). Sherry Ortner's tongue-in-cheek definition of "practice" is a heuristically useful point of departure: "Anything that people do" (1984:149). "What people do" should be understood to include recurrent, socially patterned, culturally informed ways of acting and evaluating, as well as what people

think they do and why. A practice-oriented approach is thus interested in experience, performance, and interaction, particularly when these have sociopolitical implications. In addition, a focus on practice entails that close attention be paid to persons as social agents, as loci of understanding, and as intentional or (more commonly) unwitting mediators between social structure and everyday action, the macroscopic and the microscopic, and the past and the present. It is in the practice of everyday life that social structures and cultural constructs are reproduced and sometimes altered. An analysis of social practice hence focuses on the social, political, cultural, and economic nature of institutions and other settings in which everyday social action takes place, and on how the nature of these settings informs social action. David Barton summarizes the relationship between literacy event and practice succinctly: "Literacy *practices* are the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy that people draw upon in a literacy event" (1991:5, also Barton 1994:33–52). Both concepts are rather broad, but this quality is a reflection of the diversity of the phenomena they are aimed to capture. In developing a conceptual vocabulary for an analysis of social life, what one loses in precision, one gains in flexibility, malleability, and descriptive power.

Among ethnographic accounts concerned with the relationship of literacy to its social context, two broad methodological trends can be identified. One, which I call *comparative-ethnographic*, contrasts the characteristics of various literacy events and practices in a particular society, and seeks to characterize the relationship between the diversity of literacies and aspects of the communicative ideology extant in the group. The other approach, which I call *event-centered*, focuses on a particular type of literacy practice, and investigates its characteristics in the context of the social and cultural processes at play in associated literacy events. A sample of particularly successful ethnographies best illustrates the potentials of each of these approaches.

### *Comparative-ethnographic studies*

Scribner and Cole's (1981) analysis of literacy among the Vai of Liberia is a classic example of a comparative-ethnographic study of the heterogeneity of literacy experiences in a specific community. While it primarily addresses psychological issues, the study also offers a rich ethnography of Vai literacy practices. Among the Vai, three different literacy traditions coexist, each associated with different languages, institutions, and social activities. Qur'anic literacy is learned in religious schools and used to read Muslim scriptures; English literacy is learned in Western-style schools and used in transactions with the outside world; and Vai literacy, which exploits a locally devised syllabary, is learned informally and used to write letters and

keep records of economic transactions. A small percentage of the Vai population is proficient in all three literacies, while others know only one or two, and a substantial number are illiterate. In this ideal comparative laboratory, Scribner and Cole set out to test two claims put forward by proponents of the autonomous model: that significant cognitive consequences can be ascribed to literacy; and that alphabetic writing in particular fosters analytic thought. They adapted to the Vai situation a battery of psychological tests, such as syllogistic problems, memory tasks, and rebus games. The results of these tests demonstrate that literacy itself is not a good predictor of cognitive skills. Rather, the cognitive performances of different Vai subpopulations can be explained in terms of the psychological and social accompaniments of each literacy tradition, particularly those that are given salience during literacy apprenticeship. For example, Qur'anic literates perform well on incremental recall tests, a reflection of the importance of memory work in Qur'anic schools. Subjects literate in the Vai syllabary perform well in rebus-solving tests, because learning and using the Vai syllabary involves rebus-like problems. Vai persons literate in English, who have attended Western-style schools, do well on tests that resemble school activities, like syllogisms. Thus the pedagogical practices that characterize each literacy experience, rather than literacy itself, shape the individual's cognitive makeup: "particular practices promote particular skills" (Scribner and Cole 1981:258).

Learning how to read and write is not simply a process of developing cognitive skills associated with the decoding and encoding of visual symbols, but also involves learning how these skills are used in their social context. Heath (1983) investigates the implications of this proposition in three communities of the rural American South: Maintown, a white middle-class community; Roadville, a white working-class town; and Trackton, a black working-class community. She found strikingly divergent patterns across these three communities in how children are socialized with respect to such language-related activities as story-telling and book-reading. In Maintown, preschool children are taught to pay attention to books from an early age. Bedtime stories are accompanied by pedagogical practices like question–answer and "initiation–reply–evaluation" sequences. In particular, questions like "What did you like about the story?" resemble the sort of analytic questions that children are expected to answer early on in school contexts. Maintown children also learn the particular turn-taking mechanisms (i.e., when to be silent, when to speak) and fictionalization skills that are valued in schools. In contrast, Roadville children learn to find connections between literacy and "truth." Roadville parents, who are predominantly fundamentalist Christians, use literacy for instruction and moral improvement, and explicitly value the "real" over the "fictional." Reading to children in Roadville is an uncommon event, during

which children are taught to be passive participants and the content of written materials is not connected to everyday life (compare Zinsser 1986). Finally, Trackton children learn early in life how to defend themselves orally and to engage in verbal play. Young children receive attention from adults if they can offer a good verbal performance. Adult Trackton residents, who are not literacy-oriented, do not read to children. Children are not asked pedagogical questions about their surroundings; Trackton adults assume that they will learn through their own efforts and by observing adults. In these three communities, pre-school children are exposed to different pedagogical practices and learn to attach different values to literacy, which will accompany them to middle-class-dominated schools and in large part determine their academic performance when it is evaluated according to middle-class standards.[8]

Distinct literacy practices may be associated with different contexts of use, and may thus play divergent roles in the lives of members of a society. Street (1984:132–80), for example, focuses on a rural community in pre-revolutionary Iran, and describes three sets of literacy practices: *maktab* literacy, commercial literacy, and school literacy. Before state schools were introduced into the rural areas, villagers learned reading and writing in Qoranic schools, or *maktabs*. *Maktabs* have traditionally been denigrated by Western commentators and educators because of their emphasis, in good Islamic tradition, on rote learning and repetition. However, in the community in which Street conducted field research, villagers transferred the literacy skills learned in the *maktab* to other contexts. During the boom years of the early 1970s, there was a growing demand from urban areas for village produce, and villagers developed entrepreneurial skills in marketing and distributing their fruit that required making out bills, marking boxes, using checkbooks, and so on. These literate skills were particularly evident among those who had attended *maktabs* and had continued Qoranic learning in their homes; they were able to use literacy skills for commercial purposes, while at the same time extending the range, content, and social function of these skills. In contrast, school literacy acquired in the context of Western-style village schooling did not provide an entry into commercial literacy. It did, however, provide a novel social and economic route to urban professional employment, notably through entry to urban secondary schools. While *maktab* literacy, commercial literacy, and school literacy belonged to different social domains, a single individual might learn more than one of them.

Situations abound in which different literacy practices compete for the same or for closely related intellectual and social spaces in the lives of members of a group. In Seal Bay, an Aleut village in Alaska, one finds two sets of literacy practices, having different historical antecedents, and conflicting social and symbolic associations: a "village" literacy, associated

with the Russian Orthodox church, conducted in Aleut using the Cyrillic alphabet; and "outside" literacy, associated with English, schooling, economic transactions, and Baptist missionaries (Reder and Green 1983). These two literacies, which until recently remained functionally separate, have begun to compete in certain contexts. Characteristically, the competition between literacies is both a reflection and an enactment of conflicts between "tradition" and "intrusion," between different economic systems, and between competing religious ideologies.

As the four case studies I have presented here illustrate, competing or coexisting literacy traditions and practices may be associated with different social contexts, different subgroups of a society, or distinct historical antecedents. The resulting tensions across literacy practices frequently become a focus of struggle between contexts, groups, and individuals. Studies of literacy in the comparative-ethnographic tradition can illuminate the ways in which literacy symbolizes and encodes social conflicts of various types.

### *Event-centered studies*

An event-centered approach to literacy typically focuses on one particular social setting where literacy plays a key role and investigates how the social characteristics of the context shape the nature of literacy as it is practiced in that setting. The context may be a social event, e.g., a church service, a class in a religious school, or the session of a court of justice; it may be a social institution, e.g., a school, in which literacy permeates both "on-stage" and "off-stage" activities; or it may be the context of production or consumption of a particular genre, such as personal letter writing or book reading. In all cases, the central object of ethnographic investigation is the way in which literacy derives its meaning from the broader context in which it is practiced, and how other aspects of the situation acquire meaning from acts of reading and writing.

How legal documents are drawn up and evaluated in a particular society is an example of the type of question that event-centered ethnography is particularly well suited to investigate. Messick (1983, also 1993) describes the production and use of written contracts and deeds associated with the ownership of land in a North Yemeni provincial capital prior to the 1962 revolution. These documents are drawn up by members of a class of traditionally educated scholars, or *'ulamā'*. While the documents are rarely dispensed with, their presence does not guarantee the effectiveness of the legal claims they purport to represent, however carefully prepared they might have been. Rather, if these claims are brought to justice, what is examined is the "honor" (i.e., background, demeanor, reputation, and training) of the scholar who prepared the documents. Literacy plays an important role in Yemeni society, and has done so for many centuries; yet

the meaning of legal literacy is specific to this society, and is defined in terms of locally salient categories like the honor of the writer. Messick further shows that this meaning can be generalized to other literacy practices in that society, in that literacy and its non-textual context are intermeshed with one another in non-legal settings in ways that resemble the patterns associated with the practice of legal literacy.

Print literacy can be subjected to comparable investigation, as demonstrated in Radway's (1991) study of the romance in Middle America. The romance, probably the singlemost important literacy genre to enter the lives of many Americans, is an immensely popular but devalued genre that supports a huge industry and that has been the subject of much disagreement among literacy critics and analysts of popular culture (Modleski 1984, Radford 1986). Radway demonstrates that the romance plays a variety of roles in the lives of its readers, who are predominantly women. For example, many readers, who typically lead a rather dreary existence, derive vicarious pleasure in identifying with the heroine of the romance. More importantly, romance reading enables readers to claim a space of their own, in which they are not required to play the nurturing role that husbands and children expect of them. Thus romance reading has a critical character, albeit a covert and non-threatening one. The resistant nature of romance reading does not reside in the text of the novels (which, in fact, often depict women as subservient and powerless), but in the social context in which the novel is consumed.

While it was not designed specifically to do so (and despite its less-than-ethnographic methodology), Radway's research opens up important avenues for an anthropological understanding of literacy consumption in post-industrial societies. First, it demonstrates that, in Western contexts as elsewhere, the meaning of literacy resides in the sociocultural context in which it is embedded, and not in any inherent property of literacy itself: the cultural meaning of a written text must be understood in terms of its relationship with this context, i.e., in terms of who the readers are, what their position is in society, how they use and judge the texts, and so on. Second, literacy can serve to sustain and reproduce certain power relations in society (e.g., between genders or social classes), but it can also help members of society to distance themselves from disadvantageous positions in these relations, and thus resist them in small but significant ways. Finally, Radway's study is a call for greater attention to be paid to mundane and devalued literacy practices like romance reading. The common narrow focus on literacy practices that are "officially" considered legitimate is probably the reason why traditional anthropological paradigms have presented hegemonic attitudes toward literacy as the "natural" consequences of literacy itself.

Shuman's (1986) ethnography of oral and written communication in an

inner-city junior high school in the Eastern United States documents the rich literacy culture that adolescents can develop more or less independently of "approved" school literacy. While reading and writing are the primary focus of on-stage pedagogical activities, adolescents also build a complex literate culture of their own, which is only remotely related to official school literacy. For example, they keep diaries, write letters to one another for a variety of purposes, and forge notes to school authorities. Rather than viewing these literacy practices as poor peripheral imitations of writing approved by and intended for adults, Shuman treats them in their own right, and finds them to be governed by complex social rules of interaction. For example, forged "hall passes" to the school authorities are frequently written collaboratively to avoid detection; who one chooses as one's collaborators presupposes a complex social organization of interpersonal alignment, which collaborative writing can either reinforce or modify. An important function of the adolescents' uses of literacy is the negotiation of social distance. For example, threatening notes stuffed into the recipient's locker are less "on record" than verbal challenges to fight, and recipients often ignore them in a manner that would not be possible in face-to-face challenges. In contrast, love notes or "best friend" notes often express intimate feelings that the writer would otherwise feel embarrassed to verbalize. Relative commitment or social distance is thus not a function of the mode of communication (i.e., speaking vs. writing), but is determined by local social norms. The same genre, in different contexts and for different purposes, can either have a distancing function or serve as a token of intimacy. Shuman's ethnography illustrates the potential complexity of the relationship between literacy practices and interactional norms in contexts that, at first glance, appear trivial and dismissable.

### *Towards methodological synthesis*

While the distinction I am drawing between comparative-ethnographic and event-centered approaches reflects broad tendencies in methodological emphasis, it is to a certain extent artificial. Indeed, the cross-contextual comparison of literacy practices presupposes some understanding of the meaning of literacy in each context. Thus the relationship of literacy to the setting in which it is practiced can be most fruitfully studied by first locating the particular literacy practice in the full range of literacy practices extant in the society under scrutiny. Far from being mutually exclusive, these two approaches complement one another, in the sense that a communicative event must be understood both paradigmatically (i.e., in contrast to other communicative events) and syntagmatically (i.e., in terms of its relationship to sociocultural processes). Many of the more effective ethnographic investigations on literacy in particular communities have emerged from a judicious combination of approaches. Interestingly, a certain polarization

emerges between the ethnographic settings in which these two methodologies are commonly employed: while many investigations of literacy in post-industrial societies take an event-centered perspective, ethnographers of non-Western settings frequently attempt to describe literacy in those societies in one fell swoop. Considerably more detailed descriptions are thus available on particular literacy events in Western societies than in non-Western settings. In this book, I attempt to remedy this imbalance by approaching the ethnographic materials from both perspectives: I will first investigate various literacy events in detail, and then complement this investigation with a more general assessment of the similarities, differences, and tensions across literacy practices and across the sociocultural and ideological dynamics with which they are associated.

A successful ethnographic investigation of literacy must also be "comparative" in a different way: it must investigate the relationship between literacy and orality. As Keith Basso points out, "writing, wherever it exists, is always only one of several communication channels available to the members of a society. Consequently, the conditions under which it is selected and the purposes to which it is put must be described in relation to those of other channels" (1974:426). Literacy and orality are frequently intertwined in social life, and the relationship between the two must be examined before the meaning of literacy (and of orality, for that matter) can be understood in all its complexities.

The relationship between literacy and orality has been the focus of a substantial body of literature emanating from two subfields of linguistics, namely sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. Primarily concerned with the structural comparison of spoken and written language, investigators working in this tradition have typically taken particular linguistic structures (e.g., subordinate clauses) and analyzed their distribution across various types of spoken and written texts (useful overviews of this research are Akinnaso 1982, Barton 1994:81–94, and Chafe and Tannen 1987). The resulting correlations are then explained in terms of what the researcher perceives as the natural "adaptation" (Pawley and Syder 1983) of language users to various communicative environments (see Chafe 1992 for a pithy statement of this stance). For example, certain types of subordinate clauses are more frequent in many forms of writing than in speaking; this pattern is said to result from the greater amount of leisure that communicators have in typical writing situations to plan and revise the texts they produce, in comparison to spoken communication, which is more immediate and less readily planned. This type of reasoning leads to the identification of oral and literate "strategies," i.e., the structural and stylistic "choices" that language users make to adapt to such factors as the presence or absence of an immediate audience, and the degree of personal "involvement" or "detachment" that they experience *vis-à-vis* the text (Tannen 1985).