# CHAPTER FIVE

## The spatiality of cultural semiotic activities: An ecological perspective on second language literacy

Alles Lebendige bildet eine Atmosphäre um sich her.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1977: 35)

A [culture] text is a mechanism constituting a system of heterogeneous semiotic spaces, in whose continuum the message ... circulates. We do not perceive this message to be the manifestation of a single language: a minimum of two languages is required to create it.

Yuri Lotman (1994: 377)

### Introduction

The Vygotskian research methodology, as I have argued in the previous two chapters, infuses cultural-historical theory with the 'dialectics of triplicity' to study being and mind-in-the-world. Whether Vygotsky talks about the sphere of mediated practices and the dynamic nature of meaning or the historical dynamics of the psyche on the border-line between biological and cultural, self and other, his conceptualisation of these issues is born in the struggle with various forms of reductionism and binarism. In this struggle, Vygotsky productively develops two major ontological categories: *sociality* - the social nature of mind in the mediated activities of meaning-making (Chapter Three) - and *historicality* - the heterochronous analysis of learning and development (Chapter Four). What has become important for cultural-historical research methodology today is to conceptualise the third ontological category - *spatiality*. This category is directly related to the concept of culture as the locus of all human activity.

Soja (1996: 71) argues that the production of space (spatiality) emerges from the dynamic relations between the "constitution" of social practices (sociality) and the "making" of historicality. Yet all too often the 'trialectics of being' is reduced to relations between sociality and historicality, while spatiality tends to be peripheralised. In cultural-historical studies of learning and development this often leads to 'culture' being unproblematically silenced, pushed to the margins of critical inquiry. In order to meditate on the production of cultural spatiality, we have to go beyond the traditional discourse about the social nature of the human psyche (Valsiner & Van der Veer 2000). We have to look at how societies over time produce spaces and locations for being, i.e., in various practices of meaning-making,

learning, identity construction, etc. We need to reveal the semiotic technologies of cultural spatiality to see what kinds of mediating artefacts afford what kinds of being and constrain other possible forms of cultural 'becoming'. In a word, we have to address critically the production of cultural spaces in social-historical activities.

This chapter explores the production of cultural spaces for literacy learning by drawing on ideas from the field of cultural semiotics, especially on those of the Tartu-Moscow school (Lotman, Uspensky, Piatigorsky and others). I find the work of this school particularly helpful in rethinking 'culture' as a spatial category. By drawing on Lotman's (1984, 1990) concept of the semiosphere, I argue that every culture produces a specific semiotic ecology - the totality of signs and texts, thereby constructing multiple boundaries between self and other, order and chaos, native and foreign, etc. Those boundaries delimit particular semiotic spaces, in which people make meaning of self and other. The production of semiotic spatiality puts ecological constraints on possibilities for transformation and change. Yet the semiosphere of culture is a 'machine of possibilities', to use Henri Lefebvre's (1991) phrase. In Lotman's view, the semiosphere is in constant motion, due to semiotic border-crossings and inter/intracultural translations. Culture is in a constant process of semiotic mutation, resulting from the tension between univocal and multivoiced forces within its boundaries and the 'intrusion' of foreign texts, people and goods from the outside.

The ecological conception of the production of cultural spatiality can be helpful then in reconsidering the universalist assumption that all immigrants undergo unidirectional assimilation by learning the cultural literacy of the mainstream. It is argued, rather, that they *hybridise* literacies by engaging in practices of intercultural communication and translation and by building the elements of thirdness (e.g. new meanings, identities and heterocultural or diasporic spaces). It is therefore essential to recognise these processes in educational settings. Thirdspace literacy is one important step in this direction if we are to make school practices relevant to students' home and community life. Literacy education that does not recognise the important role of minority students' 'funds of knowledges' and semiotic resources not only restricts their participation in classroom activities but also has social and intellectual consequences.

## 5.1 The production of cultural spatiality: A cultural-semiotic perspective

Vygotsky's robust theory of learning and development pays ample attention to the social and historical dimensions of these processes. However, this methodological perspective needs an elaboration of the spatial dimension or, rather, of its production. This applies particularly to rethinking the concept of 'culture' as it was understood by Vygotsky some 80 years ago. Popkewitz (1998: 539) argues that Vygotsky's work was "part of what current

sociological literature refers to as *modernity*, a movement of ideas, institutions, and technologies" that is concerned with the construction of the reasoned person within the context of universalised culture. Even though Vygotsky lived and worked in a multicultural state (the Soviet Union), he assumed a certain progression toward a universal culture. This Hegelian-Marxist view of progression was tied to the desire of the Communist Party for a new social-political order and for a new type of (Soviet) people, without cultural distinctions. Therefore, Vygotsky's concept of culture circulated within this political context of privileging the Western mode of scientific reasoning. Moreover, when Luria (1979) studied the psychological consequences of literacy in Uzbekistan, comparisons of intellectual activity in different cultures were made with regard to Russian literate culture as a point of reference. It was argued that the reorganisation of activity based on formal schooling produced qualitative changes in the thought processes of Uzbek peasants. It is, then, important to renew the 'dialectics of triplicity' to reflect on the new conditions in the production of cultural spatiality, as a context for learning and development.

Contemporary cultural-historical and sociocultural psychologists, such as Cole (1996), Engeström (1987), Scribner (1997), Shweder (1991), Tulviste (1999), Wertsch (1998) to name just a few, seek to rethink the Vygotskian general concept of culture in addressing particular cultural practices and kinds of thinking. Clearly, this is not a move to reduce 'culture' by studying isolated activities. Rather, the aim is to construct a comprehensive notion of culture as a complex polysystem or a network of activity systems, in which differences co-exist within the imagined boundaries of the official culture. On the one hand, there is no denial that the official culture produces a single space for those who live within its borders. It creates a common modality (Lotman 1976) by narrowing the multiplicity of meanings toward the singularity of an authoritative definition. On the other hand, the ramifications within cultural-historical studies today are based on the exploration of diverse cultural-semiotic activities and their role in learning and psychological development. Consequently, 'culture' becomes increasingly conceptualised as a multivoiced formation of different cultural-historical activity systems (Engeström 1999). From this point of view, the key feature of learning-leading-development is that it can not be conceived as an one-dimensional course determined by the official culture. Rather, developmental changes and trajectories will depend in many ways on local decision-making, reached strategically and collectively in multiple systems of social activities, "under conditions of uncertainty and intensive search" (ibid.: 34). Uncertainty arises from the very asymmetrical relations of power between those meanings produced by the official culture and the heteroglossic creativity of local activity systems.

Interestingly enough, cultural-historical theory develops a perspective of radical localism to understand these complex relations of power. The idea is that the juxtaposition of official

cultural monologism and cultural diversity - and thus the potential for new meanings - occurs in each and every activity system (in a particular material-semiotic locality of practices). Power is understood in terms of semiotic movement; it is exercised "by concrete human beings with the help of mediating artefacts" (Engeström 1999: 36). Hence, it is helpful to look at culture "more as a multilayered network of interconnected activity systems and less as a pyramid of rigid structures dependent on a single center of power" (ibid.). This view of culture, as a polysystem of activities and practices, entails a nested spatial perspective on learning and development - a systemic approach that focuses both on macro- and micro-processes in culture.

To elaborate this point, Cole (1999: 92) uses the metaphor of "garden" to draw researchers' attention to these two perspectives on situated learning and development. If we conceive of an activity system as a 'garden', then cultural-historical researchers can attend to a particular cultural-semiotic ecology of that activity system, in which a future generation of children 'grows' socially and intellectually. We can study and design "the right combination of factors to promote life within the garden walls" (ibid). However, as Cole argues further, "gardens do not ... exist independently of the larger ecological system within which they are embedded" (ibid.). It is not possible to arrange appropriate conditions for learning and development locally without attending to larger environmental issues. A distinct cultural activity system (a 'garden') is nested in the broad material-semiotic environment - the (meta)ecology of the social activity network.

Hence, I start my exploration of cultural spatiality from the maximal macro-perspective on the interaction between sociality and historicality. In particular, it is interesting how social individuals create a distinct space - the cultural-semiotic sphere - in their interaction with the world and each other across larger time-scales of historicality. This sphere can be understood as an ecology of all semiotic activity, including cultural eco-systems of language and literacy. Particular language and literacy practices are nested within this (meta)ecology of the cultural semiotic.

## 5.1.2 The semiosphere of culture

On the maximum time-scale of historicality we can assume the existence of global semiotic space - ecosemiotics (Deely 1990; Hoffmeyer 1997; Sebeok 1997) - which includes biosemiotics and anthroposemiotics as aspects of organism-environment interaction, both human and non-human. It is in the mutual interaction of human and non-human, material and semiotic, that this space can be understood as an ecological whole consisting of relations between various parts (Bateson 1979; Schatzki 2000). The connections between parts of the whole are made semiotically within bodies - biosemiotics (e.g. DNA) - and

between bodies (e.g. anthroposemiotics in practices of communication through various semiotic means). In this interaction, humanity is embedded in nature and its processes as a part of a single organicist whole.

Yet, within this organicist totality, there emerges a distinct ecological force - human consciousness - due to the social engagement of humans in practices with the world. The material-discursive field created in this engagement in practice assumes a paramount importance for understanding how the cultural mind has evolved in spatial-ecological terms. Connecting the emergence of social consciousness, or the 'noosphere', to the birth of the material-discursive space of practice, Bakhtin (1986: 137) observes:

> Something absolutely new appears here: the supraperson, the supra-I, that is, the witness and the judge of the whole human being, of the whole I, and consequently, someone who is no longer the person, no longer the I, but the other.

Bakhtin's definition of the emergence of the noosphere (intelligent space) presupposes a deep organicist embeddedness of humans within lived worlds (Holland & Skinner 1997), in which they interact with nature and each other according to the dialogical principle of semiosis. This interaction is binary, asymmetrical, and, at the same time, unitary. Attributing the source of living energy to dialogical events, Bakhtin argues that developments in consciousness and self-awareness, the production of thought - as the production of being - can only take place through contact with an Other. Just as life-forms in nature provide the modes of otherness for humans to understand their own distinctive life-form, so different cultures, cultural groups or individuals require the other to understand their particular identities.

In developing the Bakhtinian thesis on the historical production of social-mental space, Lotman (1984, 1990) introduces the concept of the *semiosphere*. He derives this notion from Vernadsky's (1945) 'biosphere', or in connection with the notion of the living environment. As life on earth depends on many natural and cosmic features (e.g. solar energy), so too does it become increasingly dependent on human semiotic activity. Humans have created the noosphere - the intelligent living environment (Bakhtin 1986) - and the semiosphere - a space in which languages, texts and cultures intertwine. However, as Ivanov (1998: 792) puts it, without the semiosphere the noosphere is unthinkable. That is, the semiosphere is the conditional space without which social life would be impossible. It is as necessary for human survival as the biosphere, the hydrosphere or the atmosphere. Moreover, it penetrates these spheres and consists in communication: images, sounds, odours, movements, colours, electric fields, waves of any kind, chemical signals, touch, etc. (Hoffmeyer 1997). Hence, Lotman's concept of the semiosphere can be understood as a

living space of cultural semiosis that comprises simultaneously the material space of human activities and the intelligent space (the Bakhtinian noosphere).

In more concrete terms, Lotman (1990) applies the concept of the semiosphere to particular cultures. He defines the semiosphere of culture as a 'secondary modelling system', in which natural language (the primary modelling system) is historically used as *material* for the textual production of representations and the description of reality in speech communication, in written languages and in the language of pictorial arts. Like Bakhtin, Lotman rejects the concept of language as a 'prison-house' (Clark & Holquist 1984) in favour of its conception as an ecosystem - a living space of communication with a plenitude of functional asymmetries and unfinalised meanings (Bakhtin 1981, 1986). The cultural semiosphere is, then, an historically dynamic space of social semiotic activity.

On the one hand, the semiosphere puts constraints on the semiotic activity of people by providing specific textual resources for meaning-making. As such, it includes all semiotic acts past and present and possesses a "memory which transforms the history of the system into its actually functioning mechanism, ... the mass of texts ever created and ... the programme for generating future texts" (Lotman & Uspensky 1984: xii). In this function, the semiosphere of a particular culture allows people to make sense of the otherwise meaningless objects in the world as well as to fashion human attributes - a specific cultural psychology. On the other hand, the semiosphere is a deeply postformalist notion in that Lotman tries to escape the gridlock of traditional structuralism. The semioticians of the Tartu-Moscow school put the Bakhtinian concept of dialogicality at the centre. They argue that cultural conventions are historically disrupted in a dialogical communication with the Other. The dialogical encounters with difference lead to the emergence of new meanings and, consequently, to new unpredictable directions in cultural development.

The notion of the semiosphere implies then the notion of dialogical intersemiosis that occurs on the boundaries between us and them, self and other, our culture and foreign culture. Every culture constructs such boundaries within which semiotic activity is organised on different levels of sign systems. Let us look first at what might be inside the boundaries of the cultural semiosphere.

According to Lotman (1990: 131), the external boundary of cultural semiotics separates "our" space which is safe and ordered from "their" space which is hostile and chaotic. Besides this function of ordering and organising reality, the boundary is also the bilingual mechanism that translates external messages into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa. As in Bakhtinian dialogue, any cultural semiosphere and its text-generating mechanism depend on otherness and its semiotic input in order to forge appropriate

conditions for semiotic enrichment and change. The boundary translation between "us" and "them" is not a perfect assimilation of difference but, rather, results in "approximate equivalences" - new hybrid semantic connections and meanings (Lotman 1990: 37). Thus, the boundary determines both the internal mechanism of textual production and the mechanism of translation through which the semiosphere can be in contact with non-semiotic and alien semiotic spaces.

The same basic boundary division occurs also *within* the semiotic sphere of a particular culture and reflects its asymmetrical nature - the 'bipolar asymmetry' (Lotman 1990). The semiosphere has a centre surrounded by increasingly amorphous areas moving in the direction of the periphery (Figure 5.1). If the centre contains dominating sign systems that include sign users, texts, and codes that are elaborately organised, the periphery, on the other hand, is characterised by heterogeneity and fragmentation and is responsible for dynamics within the semiosphere.
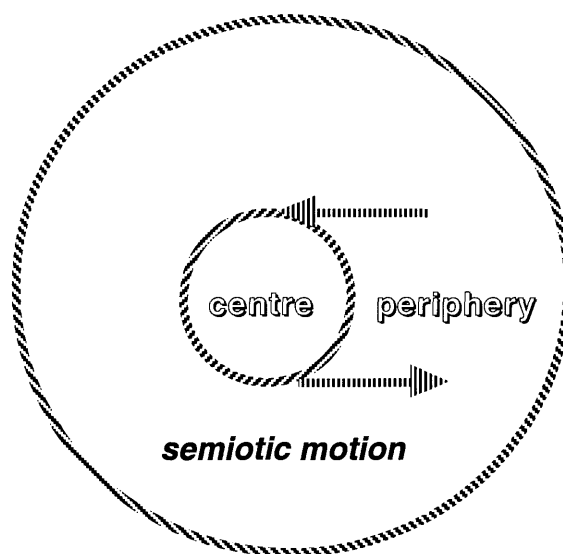


**Figure 5.1** Semiosphere of culture.

However, the conception of the centre and the periphery, in Lotman's (1990: 138) words, is just a rough primary distinction:

> In fact, the entire space of the semiosphere is transected by boundaries of different levels, boundaries of different languages and even of texts, and the internal space of each of these sub-semiospheres has its own semiotic which is realised as the relationship of any language, groups of texts, or separate texts, to a metastructural space which describes them, always bearing in mind that languages and texts are hierarchically disposed on different levels [creating] a multileveled system.

That is, Lotman's perspective on cultural semiotics presupposes the presence of a centre or origin in the play of signification, but he tends to a poststructural conception by exploring relations between multiple centres and margins. Therefore, the fundamental culturally perceived differences and oppositions, such as 'high - low', 'left - right', 'white - black', 'good - evil', 'town/centre - countryside/periphery', 'male - female', 'normal - abnormal', etc., perforate the semiosphere by creating multiple inner boundaries that specify its regions (sub-semiospheres). The play of signification and translation across those borders leads to the semiotic 'irruption' of texts and signs into an 'alien territory' and ultimately to the emergence of new meanings.

In this view of the cultural semiosphere, we can observe an interplay of diachrony and synchrony, continuity and contingency, identity and alterity. The concept of boundary creates the very possibility of thinking about what is inside - individuality, collective identity, normativity, values, moral positions, etc. - as relatively stable and historically continuous phenomena. This is, according to Lotman (1990), the result of autocommunication ('I - I', or internal dialogicality) within the boundary of a sub-semiosphere. But this stability can be lost when boundaries collide, within the process of translation. That is, in communication between differences (e.g. 'own - alien', 'I - s/he', 'us - them', 'high - low', etc.) the dynamic reconstruction of texts may lead to the alterity of identities and meanings. By paying attention to both intrasemiosis (autocommunication) and intersemiosis, Lotman argues that the interplay between them yields the most new information.

However, this dialogical communication with difference is characterised by functional asymmetry, running its spectrum "from complete mutual translatability to ... complete mutual untranslatability" (Lotman 1990: 125). From the centre of the semiosphere to its periphery, translatability decreases. The centre, monological, the locus of meta-language, attempts to regulate the entire semiosphere, translating it into its own language. However, the periphery, dialogical, is the "area of semiotic dynamism ... where new languages come into being" (ibid.: 134). The periphery is also the 'filter' through which a culture comes into contact with other cultures, translating them. Any synchronic section of a culture will reveal a dialectic between centre and periphery, inside and outside, canonised and non-canonised texts. In this dialectic the entire semiosphere is set in motion from outside. As a complex mechanism, it can not 'switch itself on by itself' but, rather, depends on input from other cultures to change and develop.

For Lotman, the semiosphere of culture is in a constant state of mutation. It always oscillates between centre and periphery, identity and alterity, native and foreign. His speculations on translation and intersemiosis present the boundary as the semiotic 'hot spot'.

The tension between 'us' and 'them', inside and outside, is most evident at the boundaries. This tension maintains the semiosphere in a state of 'creative ferment' and conflict, both separating and blending languages, genres, texts and cultures. The boundaries of the semiosphere are sites of semiotic creativity, facilitating cultural dynamics.

### 5.1.2 The formation of text-generating mechanisms

In developing the concept of the cultural semiosphere, scholars of the Tartu-Moscow school pay particular attention to the history of textuality. While this broad area of their studies remains beyond the scope of this chapter, I will focus just on some points related to the problem of cultural dynamics. In particular, the Tartu-Moscow school ties an historical exploration of cultural semiotics to the dialectic of monological and dialogical in textual production. This can be seen in the tension between two text-generating mechanisms within the semiosphere: the central and the peripheral. The former functions according to determinative laws, patterning, stylising and hence making the plot (of the text) predictable. The latter is characterised by dialogical ventriloquation and hence is marked by indeterminacy and unpredictability. These two meta-types of text-generating mechanisms are higher order cultural semiotics, consisting of and constituting a variety of genres and text-types. I use this higher degree of semiotic generalisability to argue that the cause of cultural-semiotic dynamics can be seen in the tension between central and peripheral texts, colliding at the 'nodal points' of their intersemiotic exchange. These points are also 'bifurcation points' at which the semiotic construction of predictability, certainty and regularity breaks off, due to accident, revolution and other dramatic historical shifts (Lotman 1990: 231-233). Therefore, before exploring the spaces of 'semiotic polyglotism' and ambiguity we need to address how the central and peripheral mechanisms of textual production are historically organised.

Both mechanisms of textual production are particular systems of cultural interpretation, in which cultural memory (inheritable and uninheritable) plays a central role in the continuous stream of semiosis (cf. Barthes 1968, 1972). Cultural memory is sustained through a constant movement of 'texts' for which the entire population or a particular group have one and the same relationship. Cultural myths and legends can be taken as an historical example of such a circulation of texting and remembering.

What is essential about mythical texts? Lotman (1979: 161) argues that the historical nature of cultural-semiotic mechanisms lies in narrative forms representing events that are known not to have taken place: "at the center of the cultural massif there is a textual mechanism for engendering myths". One can start, then, not from an historical exploration of the social functions played by myths and legends but from revealing their nature philosophically to

understand how they function in the cultural order. According to Lotman, one way of doing this is to analyse how the category of time was understood in the early modes of textual production. He says that the textual mechanism of myths and legends discloses their subjection to cyclical-temporal motion in the world, characterised by the absence of the categories of beginning and end:

> The text is thought of as a mechanism which constantly repeats itself, synchronized with the cyclical processes of nature: the seasons of the year, the hours of the day, the astral calendar. Human life is not regarded as a linear segment enclosed between birth and death, but as a constantly recurrent cycle. ... Such a narration does not aim to inform any particular reader of something of which he is unaware; rather it is a mechanism which ensures the continual flow of the cyclical processes in nature itself. (ibid.)

Myths and legends have come to constitute the central mechanism of textual production on this principle of meaning-making to ensure the continual flow of cultural memory, rituals, traditions and knowledge.

Lotman (1979: 162-163) defines the peculiarity of such a form of cultural semiosis in that, firstly, the choice of the content of the narration is not dependent on the narrator (author) of the text. Rather, narration is a "part of a chronologically secure ritual, conditioned by the course of the natural cycle" (e.g. birth - dismemberment - death - resurrection - new life). One can start narration from any point in this cycle. Secondly, mythical texts tend toward iso- and homo-morphism, reducing the diversity in the world to invariant images and hence relating to anyone in a particular cultural group. Thirdly, it is through mythic invention that cultures constructed the first conceptual models of the world (Donald 1991; see also 'the spiral of knowing' in Wells 1999, 2000). These characteristics of myths engender some general features of the central mechanism of meaning-production.

The central mechanism of cultural semiosis can be thought of as a particular mode of meaning-making and knowing that becomes dominant over time. It produces texts in which a variety of events is fixed to represent the invariant images and forms of collective reflection, generalised cultural memory (e.g. historical texts, chronicles, annals) and knowledge (e.g. scientific texts). As Lotman (1979: 162) argues:

> Texts engendered by the central text-forming mechanism played a classifying, stratifying and regulating role. They reduced the world of excess and anomalies to norm and system. ... They dealt not with phenomena which happened once and without reference to natural laws, but with events which were timeless, endlessly reproduced and, in that sense, motionless. ... These events are thought of as inherent to a certain position in the cycle, and repeating themselves from time immemorial. The regularity of the repetition makes of them not an excess, a chance of occurrence, but a law, immanently inherent in the world.

What Lotman has in mind is that the central, cyclical, text-generating mechanism does not imitate the natural law of movement. Rather, it fixes anomalies, presenting them as regular and organised. The central mechanism of cultural semiosis is constructed on the principle of an integrated whole "equipped with a single plot and *higher* meaning" (Lotman 1979: 176, emphasis added). Although it is represented as a group of texts, these texts play the role of a normalising mechanism based on an organised topology (e.g. spatial-temporal relations), leaving a trail of collective memory and consolidating cultural identity. All texts produced within the central mechanism of cultural semiosis become organically linked, situated on a meta-level in relation to all other texts of the given culture. Because cultural rituals, practices and activities are constructed within this sphere of texting, only some practices, discourses and memories (histories) are promoted as the preferred cultural repertoire, evolving 'naturally' to become the cultural canon.

Canonised practices, texts and memories are legitimised by the dominant groups in order to recreate a collective cultural identity across generations and to uphold continuity and resist disintegration. In this function, central texts engender a cultural and intellectual hegemony that seeks order through coercion, rejecting and illegitimating 'lower' or 'non-cultural' texts, identities and practices. Reproduction of the central texts *is* then a form of collective remembering, promoting the forgetting of historical anomalies, chance occurrence, and things that do not fit into the linear trajectory (unless they change their status). In this view, collective memory sedimented in central texts, rituals and customs helps reproduce the ingrained ways of doing and thinking. It is filled with moral imperatives that regulate rights, duties and understandings of what is right and appropriate. It is *not* an inherited feature of cultural psychology, but the outcome of power relations within a semiotic system (Even-Zohar 1990). Collective memory constructed in this way works as a bulwark against 'chaos', making it difficult to observe and appreciate the role of those dynamic tensions which operate within the culture for its efficient maintenance.

For this reason, as we have seen, the Tartu-Moscow school sees the semiosphere of culture not as a simple storage of central texts but, rather, as a construction site which resides on the boundary between the central and peripheral groups of texts. The mechanism of translation and exchange between these groups of texts is a site of antagonisms and conflict over meaning and definition, without which any culture would very likely stagnate after a certain period of time (Lotman 1990).

On the one hand, central texts function as representational and mediating means for interpretation/translation. They are generalised to such an extent that they form common sense within a cultural system by relating to and speaking about any of its members. On the other hand, peripheral texts deconstruct the spatial-temporal isomorphism of central texts.

They violate the certain primordial order by narrating about particular, unique and chance events. Peripheral texts have memories whose archaeology is fractured. The dialogic interaction between these two types of texting and translation results in a profound reconstruction of the whole mechanism of cultural semiotics - the reconstruction of text and the loss of isomorphism between its levels (cf. the notion of 'novelness' in Bakhtin 1984). This guarantees the dynamic of culture (cf. Lemke 1993), which, paradoxical as it may sound, is the only way of preserving it (Even-Zohar 1990). If no such 'competition' is possible, we often witness the gradual abandonment of certain cultural practices and movement to another cultural repertoire (e.g. a replacement of a language system), or even a total cultural collapse and disintegration (ibid.).

Cultural semioticians argue that living culture needs effective 'sub-cultures' (sub-semiospheres) which exert real pressure on the monological and canonised centre. The double-voiced process of intersemiosis and translation points to the fact that the peripheral sphere tends to recentre the cultural whole which would otherwise remain based on the petrification of central texts and meanings. The active periphery presents culture as a polysystem of fragmented entities which bring it its vitality. Liminal texts, carnival, local knowledge and memories (Bakhtin 1968; Turner 1974) oppose the function of the centre to construct an absolute model of the world leading to stagnation: peripheral texts create a kind of 'archive of excesses' or 'meaning surplus' not inherited from the canonised texts (Lotman 1979). Moreover, the peripheral group of texts turns out to be capable of transference to represent a different cultural memory, but now not in the form of a single text. Rather, this form of cultural memory represents an extremely disorganised world-picture - remembering anomalies, violation of order and non-central events. This cultural memory is mostly about chaotic and tragic events and the absence of general historical regularity. By the same token, the central mechanism of regulated and normalising order is seen from the periphery as a lack of order. The cultural-semiotic periphery translates the macro-politics of the centre into the micro-politics of the local.

As these two forms of cultural semiosis and remembering fight for their positions in a given culture, the real mechanism of textual production assumes the existence of two (or multiple) semiotic spaces. In this case, the contradictions between particularised and generalised spaces within a text, as well as between one world and the other, destabilise the monologic asymmetry and the fixities of constructed boundaries.

For example, texts in particular practices constitute micro-ecologies for meaning-making within the boundaries of 'cultural discourses' or 'discourse formations' (Lemke 1999). From this it follows that the more meaning-making potential is reduced to resources of a particular semiotic formation ('semiotic topography'), the more noticeably meaning is

reduced to singularity (Lotman 1979). Yet, according to Lemke (1999), meaning-making actions involve the (re)construction of relations within and between semiotic formations. People, in their social dynamics (Lemke 1995), often find themselves on the borders of semiotic worlds, between multiple semiotic spaces. Hence, the more the cultural-semiotic mechanism is characterised by the redistribution of textual segmentation borders and the deconstruction of isomorphic relationships, the more there is a possibility for heteroglossia, difference and multiple constructions of meaning. In this respect, the boundary between the central and peripheral spheres of culture becomes blurred as the characters in texts and people in their real-life social dynamics have an opportunity to cross the boundaries in the ongoing mutating dynamics of the cultural semiosphere.

In brief, Lotman (1979) and others remind us that the historical formation of the text-generating mechanisms within a culture is a dynamic process which reflects two meta-tendencies - the tendency toward uniformity and order, and the tendency toward diversity and cultural 'polyglotism'. As a result of these two tendencies, the sphere of cultural semiotics contains functionally mutating texts and textual practices, as well as the potential for new possible texts, memories and identities. This semiotic dynamics occurs on the boundaries - the areas of indeterminacy - which summon 'unlimited semiosis and drift' (Eco 1990) and hence life within the cultural semiosphere. Lotman consciously idealises the opposition between the central and the peripheral mechanisms of textual production, in order to "articulate the constant tension in the definition of norms, customs and laws" and, we can add, of memories and identities (Papastergiadis 2000: 184). The periphery never passively accepts central texts but, in translating them, produces conversion (hybrids, parodies, ventriloquations). Foreign texts have the same potential as they become incorporated inside the semiosphere of the receiving culture. This issue is addressed in the following section.

### 5.1.3 The mechanism of intercultural translation.

As has already been mentioned, the semioticians of the Tartu-Moscow school have formulated the dialogical model of communication on the typology of relation ('us') and differentiation ('them'). This principle refers also to intercultural communication, which occurs on the boundary of two cultural worlds. The topology of culture - how spatial-temporal relations are organised and made meaningful (e.g. the proximity of the other) - defines the politics of interpretation, translation and communication with the cultural other. As Lotman (1990: 131) remarks:

> Every culture begins by dividing the world into "its own" internal space and "their" external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the topology of the culture.

The topology of relation/differentiation organises a culture in such a way that everything which is inside (or near to the centre) is seen as meaningful, whereas outside of it everything is chaotic, disorderly and difficult to understand. In these circumstances, anything in its approximation to the cultural inside can be thought of as texts, whereas what is outside is understood as non-texts. What is inside is therefore more valued and normally more meaningful.

Members of any culture, too, in the conception of the Tartu-Moscow school, will think of themselves as insiders (texts), while conceiving of persons from other cultures as outsiders (non-texts). The classification of an individual as a foreigner implies then an encounter with objects of interpretation which are spatially but not textually inside a receiving culture. However, both foreign texts and foreign people have the potentiality to be translated into cultural texts of the inside as they move from the outside. It is precisely non-texts that form the mass on the background of which the 'inside' texts are distinguished as meaningful. A culture becomes meaningful only "in the eyes of another culture" (Bakhtin 1986: 7). Thus, the presence of the Other is a productive force that facilitates dialogue and the mechanism of translation.

A dialogue with the cultural other and its translation, however, presuppose asymmetry. This is because the 'inside' and the 'outside' texts do not have mutual semantic correspondences. The foreign text appears in its original form; it is then assessed with regard to its possible contribution to the receiving culture. If the foreign text is perceived by the cultural inside as a problem or a threat, it is officially excluded or marginalised already in the process of its initial translation. On the other hand, if the text is assumed to offer a positive contribution, it is officially included. The mechanisms by which dialogue with foreign 'texts' occurs is, then, characterised by practices of both exclusion and inclusion (Figure 5.2).

Exclusion works to set boundaries between a culture and a 'non-culture' or a different culture, texts and 'non-texts', meaningful and more difficult to understand (Lotman 1990). Behind this distinction is a more general notion of cultural semiotics that suggests an analogy with grammar: the 'inside' texts are grammatical and therefore can be interpreted, while the 'outside' texts (non-texts) are ungrammatical and thus difficult to translate. Lotman and Piatigorsky (1978) define non-texts as those which are conceived of by culture as not worth interpreting. Both the mechanism of exclusion and the historically accumulated grammatical texts of the cultural inside form specific modes of textual practices and literacy values that define what is worth writing, reading, and talking about. These ideational constructions of the cultural inside interact with the practical spheres of semiotic life in which a culture attends selectively to the objects and texts 'out there'.
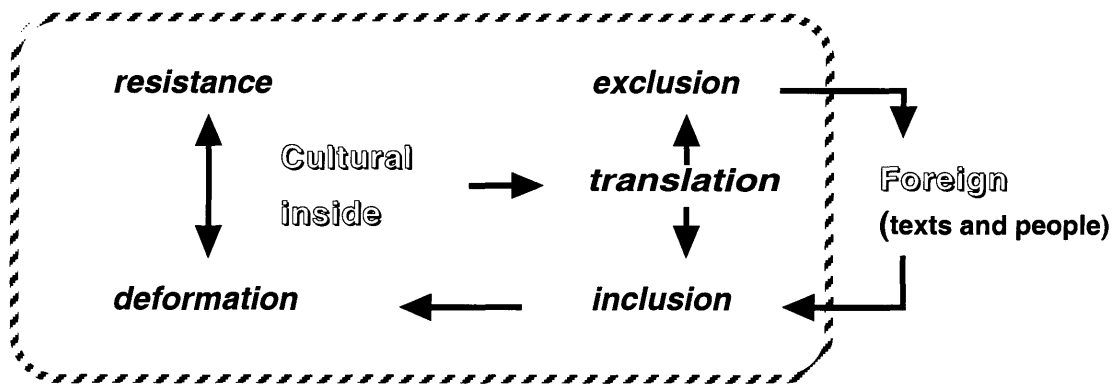
**Figure 5.2** Mechanism of intercultural translation.

Inclusion of foreign texts presupposes both attention and (re)writing. Attention is the first step in translating "ungrammatical" texts and foreign behaviours in accordance with the grammar of a receiving culture. The process of translation (appropriation in Bakhtin) is deformative; it is always based on some kind of practice typicality, existing in the given culture on the level of textual and practice types. To integrate foreign texts into the cultural inside means to assimilate them within those recognisable and repeatable types of textual practices. On this basis, there emerges a tendency to deprecate the source of origin from which foreign texts (and foreign people) come by transforming their strangeness into sameness. For this reason, all foreign texts that are worth interpreting tend to be deformed in activities and practices of a receiving culture. However, there also emerges a counter-tendency. Foreign texts resist the process of deformation, owing to their origin in different cultural-semiotic systems. As a result of this tension, the process of inclusion, according to Lotman (1972: 110), implies a complex intertextual polylogue:

> A polylogue is constantly going on in the text between different systems, for here different ways of explaining and systematising the world collide, as do different images of the world. (my translation)

In the polylogue between different semiotic systems, the foreign text can not be completely assimilated. It 'infects' the mechanism of textual production and contributes to the production of original texts. The foreign text is now incorporated within a receiving culture as a new hybrid text.

The accumulation of hybrid (deformed) texts may give rise to an historically new textual practice type, leading, in its turn, to profound changes in the overall mechanism of cultural semiotics. Rampton (1995), for example, describes in this connection the emergence of local interracial vernacular practices and text-types. Creolised texts, as we can see in this study, are texts without closure, due to their dialogical character and discursive

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ambivalence. As they become a part of the everyday cultural polylogue, they add resistance to the complete closure that language and literacy politics tend to have.

This phenomenon is explained by Bakhtin (1981, 1984) as 'double voicing' - a tension between a 'foreign word' and a 'native word', leading to a double orientation. He observes that, in principle, we can differentiate between two major tendencies toward a 'foreign' word (*chuzhoe slovo*). One tendency, as I described above, has to do with the assimilation and stylising of the foreign. Another tendency is to appropriate a foreign word in order to create a tension between the original context of its use and the context of its appropriation. In literature a foreign word is often used in parody and satire. In speech the very act of choosing a foreign word establishes a certain evaluative orientation and represents a partial response. This can be seen especially in discourses of immigrants, in positions of 'in-between-ness', as a reaction to the assimilative transformation of their difference. The metalinguistics (Bakhtin 1984) of operating in two languages (or with native and foreign words) is a strategy to resist complete assimilation.

Hence, the intertextual and intercultural space of dialogue and translation can not have closure in any strict sense. A tension between the processes of deformative interpretation and resistance to deformation leads to the opening up of new semiotic possibilities. According to Lotman (1990: 2), texts should always be understood as 'binary' semiotic objects, presupposing "a parallel pair of mutually untranslatable languages which are, however, connected by a 'pulley', which is translation". In his insistence that asymmetry in translation and untranslatability are at the basis of intercultural exchange, Lotman is indebted to the Bakhtinian theory of dialogicality, for which creativity and generation of new meaning is crucial.

However, cultural-semiotic dynamics and the potential for innovative changes may vary, depending on specific historical, social and psychological conditions. Lotman (1990: 35) argues that the semiotic dynamics of a given culture depends on how that culture is oriented toward 'foreign' texts. He distinguishes between cultures that are predominantly oriented toward autocommunication and those which are more open to 'messages' from outside:

> Cultures oriented to the message are more mobile and dynamic. They have a tendency to increase the number of texts *ad infinitum* and they encourage a rapid increase in knowledge. ... Cultures oriented towards autocommunication are capable of great activity, but are often much less dynamic than human society requires.

In this view, the semiosphere of an immigrant-receiving culture is characterised by the potential for more rapid development, due to its internal heterogeneity. But in order to realise this potential in conditions of multicultural life, constant public attention is required

to cultural politics and, especially, to the issues that arise from asymmetrical relations between centres and peripheries. Thus, it is essential to relate analysis of the semiosphere to the politics of language and literacy in multicultural states.

## 5.2 The political ecology of second language literacy

Lotman's exploration of cultural-semiotic spatiality, especially of asymmetrical relations in processes of 'bilingual translation', presents the cultural semiosphere as a heterogeneous polysystem evolving in relations of power. His notions of boundary and semiotic border-crossing highlight the ideological nature of all cultural-semiotic practice. Obviously, the concept of the semiosphere implies the *political* dimension of semiotic motion. Lotman cleaves open the hegemonic political discourse within the bounded notion of the semiotic space of culture by mapping the turbulent patterns of its semiotic movement. While the monological centre produces texts to homogenise meaning and construct a discrete and stable space, the process of 'bilingual translation' constantly undermines and disperses the authority of central texts, shifting their meanings by the very process of being translated. In the concept of the semiosphere, 'culture' can be better understood not as a noun but, rather, as a verb, foregrounding the dynamics of language and identity. Because the semiosphere is transected by multiple boundaries of different 'social languages' and texts, we could say that "once we face the opaque mirror of translation, language and identity can no longer be the same" (Papastergiadis 2000: 145). They shuttle between and across constructed boundaries, producing the elements of Thirdness - new texts, meanings, identities and languages.

Interestingly, Lotman's theory of cultural-semiotic dynamics and hybridity formulates some very important principles that pertain to the politics of difference today. His commitment to the dialogical principle of intersemiosis with the Other implies a radical commitment to the recognition of difference. Furthermore, the notion of the constitutive 'outside', which destabilises the claims of identity, certainty and fixed meaning in the 'inside', can also provide a conceptual link between the politics of difference and the dynamics of hybridity. The historical dynamics of the cultural semiosphere is described by Lotman neither as a simple integration of difference nor as a replacement of a centre by a periphery. Rather, the encounters of difference are seen in such a way that the binary distinctions of 'inside-outside', 'centre-periphery', 'native-foreign', etc., are transcended on the boundaries - in spaces of 'in-between-ness' .

The boundary is then not only a semiotic but also a political 'hot spot'. Here, the creation of any identity is the dialogical affirmation of difference. Yet this difference is neither immutable nor primordial (Papastergiadis 2000). A tension between socially constructed differences results in a dialogical indeterminacy of identity, opening up a process of

cultural-semiotic dynamics. New identities and meanings emerge in the very process of intersemiosis, between differences. This phenomenon of thirding and hybridisation, crucial for Lotman, Bakhtin and others, is often excluded from or bypassed in the political discourse of the multicultural state. It is traditionally seen as a transitional stage en route to complete cultural assimilation. However, for Lotman, hybridity is neither a form of inferiority nor a transitional state but, rather, is a mode of cultural-semiotic development itself (cf. Latour 1993). Hybridity is a contestatory energy that exists within and between cultural boundaries. Hence, as Bhabha (1994) argues, hybridity must be recognised first, as a cultural-semiotic Thirdspace; second, as a radically new identity; and third, as an agency in the socio-political arena of late-modern states.

These political issues are important for our understanding of semiotic activities in migrant and minority communities (diasporas), as well as in the context of L2 literacy learning in schools. For as long as we remain committed to discourses of 'purification' and to the ethics of the whole identity's self-realisation, the *productive* potential of hybridity in L2 literacy learning will abide unnoticed.

### 5.2.1 Semiotic landscaping and planning

Lotman (1990) emphasises that 'bipolar asymmetry' underlies the production of semiotic spaces. Through such spatial-semiotic markers as 'high' and 'low', 'inside' and 'outside', 'centre' and 'periphery', 'us' and 'them', etc., people make sense of themselves and of cultural spaces in which they live. These topologies also serve as building blocks to construct a communal space which would be a permanent source of protection from fears of insecurity, isolation, estrangement and the intrusion of aliens. In turn, this reifies a politics of difference that favours 'us' (identities, meanings and practices of the 'inside'), while marginalising and excluding 'them' (practices, knowledges and identities of the 'outside'). Obviously, in the production of cultural-semiotic spaces and political locations, identities and meanings become consolidated and generalised. As Artiles (2000) argues, 'us' comes to define a particular collective identity - homogeneous, hard-working, speaking proper English, etc. In contrast, 'them' are lazy, dirty, heterogenous, misuse English and take advantage of the welfare system.

Operating within the 'bipolar asymmetry' of 'high' and 'low', 'us' and 'them', the majoritarian 'inside' identifies the Other - 'newcomers', 'strangers' and 'immigrants' - as a lower category, threatening the cultural-linguistic canon, and hence as something that requires disciplining and neutralisation. The semiotic production of 'spaces of difference' (Morgan 2000) thus plays the key role in organising the presence of the cultural other. The first step in this process, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1997: 46), is the invention of the disruptive Other

who does not fit into the linguistic, cognitive, moral and aesthetic spaces of the dominant culture:

> [B]y their sheer presence, [strangers] make obscure what ought to be transparent, confuse what ought to be a straightforward recipe for action, and/or prevent the satisfaction from being fully satisfying, pollute the joy with anxiety while making the forbidden fruit alluring; ... they befog and eclipse the boundary lines which ought to be clearly seen; if, having done all this, they gestate uncertainty, which in its turn breeds the discomfort of feeling lost - then each society produces such strangers.

The next issue becomes what to do with these 'strangers' to make cultural-semiotic spaces orderly and meaningful again.

The reaction of the cultural 'inside' to the presence of the Other results in broad political initiatives directed at "making the different similar; smothering cultural and linguistic distinction; forbidding all traditions and loyalties except those meant to encourage conformity to the new and all-embracing order; promoting and enforcing one, and only one measure of conformity" (ibid.: 47). Needless to say, a semiotic landscaping of the supposedly homogeneous cultural space then becomes the major strategy to pursue these political goals.

Semiotic landscaping refers to all conscious efforts to affect and control social heterogeneity and cultural diversification. It includes language and literacy planning as one of its most important constitutive parts. In this process, linguistic standards are legitimised and commodified so that "language determines who has access to political power and economic resources" (Tollefson 1991: 16). That is, language and literacy planning not only establishes the semiotic hegemony of the 'inside' but also consolidates the cultural-linguistic deficit of the Other, both creating and perpetuating inequality. The initiatives in language and literacy planning, such as the English-only movement and the Hirschian model of literacy, can be taken therefore as examples of semiotic landscaping, imposing disadvantages on L2 learners.

These initiatives are representative of the interplay between the broader Anglo-fundamentalist politics of assimilation and educational reforms put up to implement this agenda. They are directed at maintaining the sacred space of cultural tradition and canon. Conservative initiatives in language and literacy education assume that difference must be metabolically transformed into the devouring broth of the large 'melting pot' to become sameness. Hirsch (1996), for instance, is especially vehement in normalising the hegemonic role that institutions (schools) play in defining what is legitimate cultural knowledge. As Giroux (1999) says, the Hirschian framework of literacy education claims to 'save' underprivileged minorities by stripping them of their identities and histories in the process

of their cultural assimilation. Hirsch (1996) sees the teaching of multiculturalism as itself a source of disadvantage for minority students. It does not occur to him that a homogenising curriculum safeguards the power and interests of dominant groups and, in justifying authoritarian intercultural relations in educational settings (Giroux 1999), has negative consequences for the psychological development of minority students (Cole 1998; Gutiérrez 2000).

In the last decade, scholars from many disciplinary fields have challenged English-only and conservative literacy initiatives which, under the banner of linguistic and cultural purism, have "pragmatically and symbolically elevated English to a high status position while relegating other languages ... - and their speakers - to a lower status position" (Barker et al. 2001: 5; also Macedo 1999, 2000; Olneck 2000, Phillipson 1992; Tollefson 1995; etc.). Sociocultural researchers question the assumed supremacy of 'English-only' and cultural literacy instruction and argue that thousands of people who were educated in these programs remain functionally illiterate (Macedo 2000). While Hirsch (1999) says that knowledge of the literacy canon and competency in 'nuanced' English are tickets to better social futures, many people from minorities who are 'competent' in English find themselves still relegated to ghettos (Macedo 2000).

A key question for language and literacy planning is "whether it will continue to be swamped by Anglo-fundamentalist intent" on sustaining the politics of the cultural 'inside' or whether it will reflect the semiotic ecology of cultural complexity, "sustaining linguistic diversity and positioning [the multicultural state] advantageously within the world's multilingual knowledge economy" (Singh 2001: 88).

When large-scale semiotic landscaping demands that all people in a multicultural state share the common language and literacy as "emblems of distinctiveness and national cultural identity", there is an inevitable tension (Lo Bianco 2000: 93). So, as we witness the implementation of assimilative language and literacy politics, there emerges a counter-tendency to revitalise efforts to sustain linguistic diversity. The logic of this process has made multiculturalism, polycentricity and semiotic multimodality central to a critical rethinking of monolithic cultural-linguistic spaces. According to Soja (1999), the process of the social production of material-semiotic spatiality is an historical phenomenon that replicates the (re)distribution of power. Therefore, regional-geographic, local social and ethnic fragmentation is a political process aimed at creating oppositional semiotic spaces, in which the vitality of multiple sociocultural identities is sustained through local literacies, social languages and other cultural practices. Not only are multiple semiotic locations needed for sociocultural minorities to feel secure. They also provide the basis for new forms

of language and literacy cosmopolitics (Singh 2001) as well as for new forms of political agency (Laclau 1996).

A new political agency emerges not from the grand fragmentation of society into classes or races but, rather, from the multiple semiotic locations of much more diverse identities constructed in local practices and discourses. As Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, local communities of practice, to which we can add ethnic, aboriginal, migrant, gender, age, religious, etc., practices, occur in coercive environments. The discourses of local practices are in many ways responses to that coercion. For instance, language and literacy practices in local socio-ethnic communities run parallel to the totalising programs of language and literacy development in schools and broader society and are tools for the collective contestation and redefinition of meanings. Hence, the sociocultural fragmentation of 'global' language and literacy into multi-languages and -literacies is a form of resistance to the political-semiotic landscaping of the centre and to the new forms of racism it produces (cf. Ogbu & Simons 1998).

As policy makers, academics and the general public struggle against Anglo-fundamentalist policies in language and literacy education, there is also a need to recognise the limitations of liberal essentialism and multiculturalism. As Papastergiadis (2000: 157) argues:

> The pluralistic model that dominates the politics of multiculturalism has done a great deal to identify new constituencies within the structures of society. It has empowered new subjects to make different claims about the priorities and trajectory of social change. However, this model has not challenged the very structures by which we see the process of identity as being formed across differences.

What we need then is to grasp the possibility of identity being formed through the interconnection of partial languages and fragmented cultures.

Lotman's model of intercultural communication, in this sense, represents a turning point in the studies of language and literacy practices from a semiotic ecology perspective. He describes some essential features of semiotic constructions of 'us', 'inside', 'centre' that become visible through a projected evaluation of 'them', 'outside', 'periphery'. By making the Other visible, he addresses those invisible links that determine the contours of the dominant 'centre'. But what is more important, Lotman moves on to explore the boundary, emphasising the ambiguity of semiotic encounters occurring in spaces of intersemiosis. The semiotic boundary, in his view, is itself a terrain of radicalisation, transformation and change of meaning, once this ambiguity is strategically superseded (e.g. in the process of articulating new meanings and identities). The semiotic ecology of language and literacy practices is formed not only in competitive cultural-semiotic locations but also in

sociocultural dynamics, inevitably involving dis-locations and border-crossings. Multicultural models of language and literacy education are possible without essentialism if we recognise the "more subtle and mixed processes of exchange" that constitute the field of cultural-semiotic difference (Papastergiadis 2000: 158). While language and literacy planning emphasises polarised cultural binaries to maintain the status quo of English-only, the cultural-semiotic perspective highlights what happens on the border, in the Thirdspace of differential interconnections and radical semiotic mutations.

In arguing for a shift from semiotic landscaping and planning to an ecological view of the language and literacy practices of migrants, I turn the focus to 'diaspora' - an open-ended space of constant oscillation between essentialised locations and identities. This perspective can be helpful in understanding the language and literacy practices of displaced people, especially the nature of cultural-semiotic mutations and heterogeneity in those practices.

### 5.2.2 Diaspora and cultural-semiotic hybridity

From an ecological perspective on the processes of intercultural semiosis, diaspora can be defined as a material-semiotic space produced in the practices of 'deterritorialised' people. It is created in the practices of intercultural exchange, translation and communication, transcending territorial states. Diaspora is a form of communal or co-ethnic organisation in places of mass migrants settlement. As such, the diasporic production of material-semiotic spatiality can be understood as a 'triadic relationship' (Shaffer 1986) between a) the 'host' culture, b) the home-land states whence migrants came, and c) the global dispersion and multi-locality of diasporic communities. This relationship of triplicity is a key analytical tool in understanding the formation of hybrid identities and literacies in diasporic communities.

The first category in the triadic relationship - the semiosphere of a host culture - constitutes the conditions and possibilities for semiotic and political activities of a diaspora. Interestingly, the foreign Other is already constituted within the mechanism of cultural translation, even before entering a host culture. All that is foreign is evaluated through the prism of textuality produced by the cultural 'inside'. For instance, such texts as immigration laws, policies and regulations define the initial trajectory of the foreign according to its possible proximity to the cultural core of the receiving society. The greater this distance, the less value is put on the foreign other. This is because any radical difference and incommensurability with the cultural core may threaten the integrity of the latter. On the other hand, a cultural proximity to the centre is given first priority because 'slight' differences in cultural traits and literacies are seen as supplementary rather than disruptive to the semiosphere of a host culture. By putting emphasis on the degree of sameness, the

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frameworks of assimilatory translation shape the trajectory of the foreign as leading to its progressive fusion and unconditional identification with the common historical life of a receiving culture (see Bhatia & Ram 2001 for a critique of acculturation frameworks).

Hence, immigrant identities are constituted, even before they enter a host culture, and are assigned multiple semiotic spatialities from which they can start their progressive journey toward full-fledged citizenship. Those locations vary in the degrees of their 'residential' proximity to the cultural core groups. Consequently, the centripetal forces engage multiple semiotic resources to enhance the assimilative acculturation of migrants and reduce cultural-semiotic fragmentation. Traditional ESL and literacy programs are designed in particular to boost cultural uprooting and remaking. Under institutional pressure to master the standard language and the 'encyclopedic' knowledge of the dominant cultural group, L2 learners are constructed as ahistorical, passive recipients of the canonical cultural texts.

Clearly, the assimilative models of intercultural communication and education see diversity as a problem or a deficit to be eradicated by making an immigrant 'one of us' regardless of his/her ethnicity, histories, memories, reasons for migration, values, traditions and 'funds of knowledge'. This process however remains incomplete. Partly, this is due to a suspended tension between a desire to assimilate difference and a need to maintain it. Difference is needed to legitimise relations of power and to control as well as exclude the Other from participation in some material-semiotic practices. The cultural assimilation of the Other is always partial - 'white but not quite'.

Therefore, the second category in the triadic relationship - the country and culture of origin - plays an important role in the process of identification and ethnification of migrants in the new cultural-semiotic environment (Friedman 1997). Keeping loyalties to the home-land helps migrants in collectively overcoming feelings of alienation, or exclusion, or marginalisation, or other kinds of 'difference'. There is ample evidence of diaspora members seeking to establish a legitimate place in new cultural spaces, largely through sustaining the vitality of their language, literate, religious and other practices. Barker et al. (2001: 8) define the parameters of linguistic vitality according to the degree L1 is used in the everyday communicative and textual practices as well as in the 'external' means of communication, such as media, public signs and symbols, billboards, street names, mail advertising, government information, etc. Through these diasporic strategies, immigrants attempt to raise themselves to a position of sociocultural competitiveness. The native linguistic and cultural literacy vitality of migrants then becomes a matter of political activity for rights, status and power. However, dominant cultural groups may control the linguistic vitality of a diasporic community by either a) facilitating or b) minimising its semiotic activities in L1.

In the first scenario, the vitality of minority identities, textual and literate practices is perceived as a necessary component of multicultural life (Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco 1999), which needs to be supported through institutional politics, media, multicultural and bilingual education (Au 2000; Bernhardt 2000; Garcia 2000). In the second scenario, diasporic multilingualism is perceived as a significant challenge to the dominance of English-language groups. A mild reaction to a perceived vitality of minority languages can then result in the conception of a cosmopolitan, cappuccino-type multiculturalism which does not require multilingualism (Joseph 1998). More conservative reactions, such as the English-only movement and other legislative actions curtailing linguistic diversity, are closely associated with anti-immigration and nationalist organisations (Barker et al. 2001). Hence, the semiotic exchange between diaspora and centre is based on the semiotic vitality of the former and the controlling politics of the latter. While the analysis of both polarities concentrates on essential features of cultural semiosis within their respective boundaries, Lotman (1990) invites us to look beyond such identifications.

The cultural semioticians of the Tartu-Moscow school claim that after a collision of differences, i.e., in semiotic exchanges between asymmetrical polarities, neither opposite remains the same. They seek to transcend the essentialism of separate and discrete textual practices (e.g. the dominant and the diasporic) by focusing on the 'semiotic physiology' of motion. In the view of this school, neither dominant nor peripheral textual practices exist separately as individualised languages but, rather, they are in a state of dialogical interdependence, leading to a constant process of cultural-linguistic creolisation.

Similarly, cultural researchers working from a postmodern perspective, such as Appiah (1992), Gilroy (1993) and Hall (1988), argue that we can not rely on forms of cultural essentialism in theorising diasporic identities and textual practices: these forms of ethnic or cultural essentialism collude with Western understandings of race, culture, and nationalism. They claim, with much basis, that the aspiration to construct an "authentic, natural, and stable rooted" diasporic identity results in an ethnic absolutism that reifies the very categories of racial and linguistic oppression (Gilroy 1993: 30). Postcolonial critics have turned to the notion of cultural hybridity for a resolution to the problems of ethnic absolutism - the static view of root identity and cultural practices - in theorising diaspora, its vitality and semiotic creativity.

Consequently, the third category in the triadic relationship - dispersion or multi-locality - acquires a paramount significance for conceptualising a diaspora as a transnational community, generating (consciously and unconsciously) the elements of cultural-semiotic Thirdness. The members of diasporic communities are caught in a double bind between

'here and there', between host culture and home-land. Gilroy (1993) reveals this paradoxical nature of transnational communities in the notion of 'double consciousness' - with regard to diasporic individuals' awareness of decentred attachments, of being simultaneously 'home away from home', or American-, British-, Australian- and something else.

According to Clifford (1994) and Hall (1990), the empowering paradox of multi-locality is that this stimulates the semiotic activity of a diaspora to construct ever-changing representations which provide a set of malleable identities. The semiotic activity of the diaspora no longer has to be cemented by exclusive territorial claims. Rather, the diaspora can be held together through cultural-semiotic artefacts and, in the age of cyberspace, by the new technologies of communication. In this way, identification with a diaspora serves to bridge the gap between essentialised ethnic locations and identities, between the global and the local. The diaspora becomes a material-semiotic space in which, according to Hall (1993: 362), displaced people are formed as hybrid identities:

> These hybrids retain strong links to and identifications with the traditions and places of their "origin." But they are without the illusion of any return to the past.... They are not and never will be unified in the old sense, because they are inevitably the products of several interlocking histories and cultures, belonging at the same time to several "homes" - and thus to no particular home.

Obviously, a diasporic space is a new sphere of semiotic practice which, due to its dialogical nature, in intercultural communication and translation, involves a political strategy of radical cultural creativity. Hybridity is disruptive of the cultural stereotyping which usually involves the polarisation of essentialised cultural identities and practices.

Illustrative of this argument is a study by Linda Harklau (1999), in which she analyses how ESL students in their writing challenge practices that enforce foreignness and polarise cultural identities. She observes that in many topics of ESL writing instruction, teachers tend to dichotomise cultural perspectives as mutually exclusive. By offering comparative-contrastive topics for reflective writing about things in 'your/their' country and 'our' country, instructors expect L2 students to emphasise their essentialised difference. While this desire for 'perpetual foreignness' reflects the broader politics of identity, L2 learners experience a sort of cultural schizophrenia by having lived in, experienced and identified themselves with two (or more) cultures. They reject stereotypes held about 'their' country and their essentialised identities and take a position of 'in-between-ness'.

In Harklau's (1999: 119) study a student from Vietnam, responding to the prompt "Are blue jeans popular in your country?", writes: "Blue jeans are very popular in my own country and around the world. *They* wear it like *we* it in the United States" (emphasis added). The

ambivalent position of double identification with one's 'own' (Vietnamese) culture and with 'our' (American) culture leads to maintaining many different identities through which "transmigrants are able to express their resistance to the political ... situations that engulf them" (Glick Schiller et al. 1996: 11). According to Said (1993), this is a marker of border-crossing innovation, transgressive intertextuality, and mobile textual self-fashioning. In writing on cultural topics, ESL students are constantly facing the dilemma of crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, the dilemma of identity reconstruction, the dilemma of choice actualised through a 'politics of the local' (Hall 1990). The hybridisation of L2 learners' cultural identities in literacy practices is a response to the asymmetrical relations of power that they face. But also hybridity itself represents a specific domain of semiotic power - "the transgressive power of symbolic hybrids to subvert categorical oppositions and hence to create the conditions for cultural reflexivity and change" (Werbner 1997: 1).

In its anti-essentialist and interruptive function, cultural hybridity selectively *denies the past*. Identification with one's home-land is characterised by the fractured remembering of the past and involves the creation of 'new maps' of desire and of attachment (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1989). With regard to this tendency, Foner (1994), for example, illustrates the transformations of Jamaican women's identities in new conditions, as a result of changes from a patriarchal to a more egalitarian way of life, in which women gain access to social-semiotic and economic resources previously beyond their reach. The blend of meanings, perceptions, and social patterns by immigrants attests to the fact that they do not become exactly like stereotyped Americans, black or white. Nor are they any longer just like stereotyped natives in their home society. New meanings, ideologies, patterns of behaviour, and 'hyphenated identities' (e.g. Asian-American or Black-British) are developed among immigrants in response to the politics of simple binarism.

Furthermore, hybridity *reconfigures the present*, challenging taken-for-granted discourses of cultural order *within* a new society. Identification with the 'host' culture is partial and thus involves the production of heterotopic space - a "space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Foucault 1986: 27). Hybridity challenges all stable meanings and representations, demonstrating how identity is never finished or complete, but "keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings, which ... 'disturb the classic economy of language and representation'" (Hall 1994: 397). Hence, the hybridity of cultural meanings, practices and identities 're-sites' the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', between past and present. It is a retrospective (with regard to the home-land) as well as a prospective (with regard to the host culture) process of translation. Diasporic identity sets settled semiotic spheres in motion by disturbing fixed understandings of the world, producing new

meanings and yet carrying the traces of those binary oppositions which gave rise to it (e.g. 'here-there', 'us-them').

The triplicity of identification affects the semiotic practices of diaspora so that cultural literacies become reconstructed selectively; some practices are sustained, while others are rejected. A diaspora in this sense is an artificially constructed semiotic space of cultural hybridity, in which the common past cultural history of mass migrants is unconsciously and collectively negotiated in present local practices. In this process, members of a diaspora do not replicate their culture of origin. Rather, they sustain those cultural-semiotic practices which "shield them from racist rejection" but also allow them "to compete for honour, to have fun, to worship, and to celebrate - together - collective rites of passage or ceremonies of nostalgic remembrance for lost home" (Werbner 1997: 12). Cultural practices and literacies of the 'lost home' are reenacted in the fragmented performativity of native discourses, narratives and written texts in order to oppose the strong centripetal forces of the dominant culture. And yet the same centripetal forces act to fracture the boundaries of diasporic literacies.

Whether we consider the household and family literacy practices of immigrants or their religious and workplace textual practices, diasporic boundaries are constantly transgressed. It is in the communicative and textual events of social practices that the unique forms of intentional hybridity can be observed most vividly. These forms are oriented prospectively and represent a more subtle and tactical deployment of racial, ethnic and linguistic categories of identification.

According to Modood et al. (1994), transgressing a diasporic boundary of practice (e.g. a religious practice of a diaspora) signals a growing split between older and younger generations as well as tension between collectivist and individualised forms of ethnic representations. Similarly, Baumann (1997) defines this process as the discursive praxis of negotiation between the 'dominant' and 'demotic' discourses of the diaspora. In his ethnographic study of a multi-ethnic urban neighbourhood in West London, Baumann analyses how residents deploy both the dominant discourses of the diaspora that reify a homologous ethnic identity and the demotic discourses that dissolve this equation of 'community', 'culture' and ethnicity. As a result, the South Asians in this study create a hybrid popular culture by fusing their identities. They intentionally subvert the normative boundaries of the diaspora set by their parents. However, on public occasions the same people revert from the 'demotic' discourses back to the dominant when there is an 'alien' threat to the reifying discourse of 'community leaders'.

Thus, the cultural-semiotic practices of a diaspora are negotiated by individuals "within, about and across their 'ethnic' identifications" (Baumann 1997: 222). Just as identifications shift contextually on the nexus 'host culture - diaspora - country of origin', hybrid identities develop a *dual* discursive competence that allows them to participate in a variety of cultural-semiotic practices. It is not surprising, therefore, that the syncretisation of cultural literacies is a complex problem with regard to L2 learners' intercultural becoming.

### 5.2.3 Hybrid literacies

Given the above-mentioned semiotic and political tendencies within and across diasporic locations, there is a need to conceptualise the literacy practices of migrants as those which involve a great deal of intercultural creativity and semiotic hybridity. There is already a growing number of literacy researchers who challenge the traditional and Hirschian models of homogenous cultural literacy on this basis (e.g. Duranti & Ochs 1996; Gutiérrez & Stone 2000, Solsken, Willett, & Wilson-Keenan 2000). These researchers emphasise that, under multicultural conditions, members of diasporic communities merge semiotic resources and discourses from different cultural practices within the same literacy activity, rather than drawing on one distinct or traditional cultural practice (Duranti & Ochs 1996).

It is important, at this point, to clarify what is meant by the notion of hybrid literacy. In counterpoint to the ideological purification of the concept of cultural literacy - a single body of knowledge which all members of a multicultural state need to know - sociocultural researchers of literacy argue that the crisis of 'monoliteracy' lies in its very tendency not to see different forms of literacies. The New Literacy Studies (Barton 1994; Gee 2000a; Street 1995) approach literacy as a set of social-political-institutional practices and hence as *multiple literacies* historically shaped and transformed within the distinctive spheres of cultural-semiotic life. Literacy practices consist in communicative events organised around and through written texts (Barton & Hamilton 2000; Heath 1983; Scribner & Cole 1981). They are regular repeated activities - "cultural ways of utilising literacy" - on which people draw in a literacy event (Barton & Hamilton 2000: 8). Therefore, in order to see how immigrants draw on several ways of utilising literacy and how they make intertextual connections, literacy events become the primary focus of sociocultural analysis.

From the ecological perspective on literacy (Barton 1994), events that involve activities of reading and writing are situated within a network of multiple literacy practices. As such, any literacy event stands with regard to a literacy practice in a relationship of particular to general. As Barton (1994: 37) puts it, "in order to understand literacy it is important to examine particular events where reading and writing are used. Focusing on the particular is

an integral part of an ecological approach". Literacy events are situated in multiple ecological niches in which different literacies are practised and sustained historically.

Barton (1994) identifies the ecological niches of literacy practices as differently valued but not necessarily opposite categories. Literacy ecologies in this sense are specific semiotic technologies of imposed and self-generated, dominant and vernacular, indigenous and imported, creative and constrained, domesticating and empowering practices with print. Because people learn literacy in different cultural-semiotic ecologies, they also have different cultural models "in minds" whenever they engage in a literacy event (Street 1995: 133). Thus, a particular literacy practice can be reenacted without obvious transformative changes only in the events of a relatively homogenous local community of practice. This type of semiotic reproduction was described by Lotman (1990) as 'autocommunication'.

However, communities of practice are not only in contact with other communities but also they become 'populated' by 'strangers' and 'newcomers', 'bombarded' by alien texts or 'invaded' by new technologies and discourses. One way or another, literacy events involve not only reproductive but also productive-transformative activities, resulting from intersemiosis. This feature is observable in those literacy events in which two (or more) literacy practices, genres or discourses interpenetrate, generating 'borderland Discourse' (Gee 1996a) and hence organic (unconscious) and dialogic (intentional) forms of semiotic hybridity (Bakhtin 1968, 1981).

In this way, the intercultural phenomenon of literacy syncretism occurs in diasporic conditions through the intermingling or merging of culturally diverse modes of practice. To support this argument, consider an example from Duranti and Ochs (1996). In their study of a Samoan-American community in South California, Duranti and Ochs observe that immigrants can be in more than one culture at a time. This becomes apparent as they analyse a literacy event in which a Samoan boy (Sike) asks for his aunt's help in completing a homework assignment.

The aunt, who is in the backyard, gives Sike directions on how to proceed with his homework; then, just as he is heading back toward the house, she instructs him to bring a box so that he can write on it. The box has been transformed into a desk. At this point two cultural activities intersect via the boundary function of an artefact, i.e., the box. On the one hand, the box is an object on which Sike can write his homework. On the other hand, this same box is an essential element of another cultural activity. It has been planned to fill the box with fine sitting mats and send them back to Western Samoa for an exchange in a very important ceremony. During this ceremony, Sike's grandfather will also be given a new chiefly title. As Duranti and Ochs (1996) point out, each use of the box indexes not only

different types of activities within different value systems but also different sets of culturally mediated expectations about the role of adults and the goals of children's socialisation.

Because Sike's aunt is immediately responsible for childcare in the family, she organises his literacy activity by using available resources (the box transformed into a desk). The grandmother however has a different cultural activity in mind. She watches them from the distance, apprehensive and somewhat irritated because Sike is using the box they need for the future cultural event. Now the aunt has to negotiate between two activities. For this purpose she uses linguistic means from two languages:

1 Aunt: okay - count this
2 how many books?
3 Sike: (pointing with pen as he counts)) one. two. three. four.
4 Aunt: Okay
5 Sike ((starts to write, turns to look at camera, goes back to write))
6 ((changes position, leaning harder on box with his right arm))
7 Gm: ((raises eyebrows exhibiting disapproval))
8 (2.0)
9 Gm: E:! leanja le ki(nj)ipusa! Hey! The empty box (gets) ruined!
10 Sike ((still writing))

27 Sike: ((kneels down and leans on the box and makes a dent))
28 Gm: le kinjipusa leanja! the box's gonna get ruined!
29 Aunt: 'aua le so oga- don't over - (i.e., don't press too hard)
30 Sike: (I write "Tom?")
31 Aunt: yeah, write your (name). write your middle name,
32 Gm: a e! Oh! ((disapproving))
33 Aunt: ((pointing to a point on page)) Ku u lemu I o Put (it) slowly there

(Duranti & Ochs 1996: 10-11)

In analysing segments of literacy events such as these, Duranti and Ochs come to the conclusion that the literacy activities of immigrants have a syncretic nature. In particular, the role of the aunt is interesting here. Her activity is both child-oriented and family-oriented. That is, she is acting within the logic of traditional Samoan child care by assuming the lower ranking role of active caregiver and, at the same time, she does not want to jeopardise the forthcoming cultural event. As the two activities intersect, the aunt uses English to help Sike with his homework and Samoan to remind him of the need to adapt to the situation (not to ruin the box). She uses the discourse typical of American teachers as well as the discourse of Samoan caregivers in a traditional household.

The blend of two languages and practices in the above given example supports Street's (1995) idea that in any literacy event participants have particular cultural modes of practice in mind. Furthermore, they can draw on two or more cultural literacy modes in one literacy event. This particularity of hybrid constructions (Bakhtin 1981) attests to the fact that

literacy activities in multicultural communities are mediated by multiple semiotic resources and ideological orientations. But these activities can *intersect* through boundary objects which have different values in different cultural literacy practices.

Texts, in this regard, can be conceived of as boundary objects through which cultural literacies intersect. While texts themselves are inseparable from the practices in which they are constituted and that they in turn constitute, literate activities are linked intertextually. Textual connections are necessary for making sense in particular literacy event. But this process is contradictory because the intertextual links constructed by participants in a collective literacy event are often based on conflicting discourses (Egan-Robertson 1998; Fairclough 1995, 2000). Therefore, people are positioned in a specific discourse while they read a text. And yet they can draw on other texts and discourses to make sense of their situated reading. This can create a tension or even an ideological conflict - the conflict between world views. Intertextual hybridity has a profoundly ideological nature.

In recognising the complications involved in different readings of a text, sociocultural researchers argue for an ideological understanding of literacy events (Street 1993). They acknowledge that the multiplicity of ideological positions and linguistic resources in literacy events can lead to conflicting claims, different potential interpretations and outcomes. Obviously, when this intersemiotic feature of literacy practices is ignored, so is the role of home and community texts in minority students' classroom learning. Moreover, when L2 students draw on their community resources and construct different meanings, they often become constructed as struggling academically and their literacy practices are seen as deficient (Lee 1995). Therefore, sociocultural literacy research attempts to reveal a) the importance of L2 students' community resources for literacy learning; b) an ideological tension between the marginalised and dominant systems of meaning; and c) the process of textual hybridisation as a complex, intertextual, and ambivalent process of meaning-making. All these foci are critical for understanding L2 literacy learning in classrooms as complexly connected to the intercultural practices and hybrid identities of minority students.

The recent study of Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000) unveils the relevance of hybridity to culturally responsive literacy education that seeks to make school practices more congruent with the home and community practices of minority children. Through the microanalysis of the oral and written texts constructed by a Latina student, these researchers have shown how the intermingling of home, school and peer language practices serves a variety of sociocultural agendas. First and foremost, textual hybridisation is connected to the construction of this girl's multiple identities: as a good student and literate member of the classroom community, by taking up the semiotic resources of classroom literacy

practices; as a loving member of her family, by drawing upon her family/community semiotic resources; as a respected member of the peer group, by taking up the semiotic practices of children; and to support the social cohesion of the group, by bridging the topics and genres of others, i.e. by intertextual hybridity.

However, Solsken et al. (2000) observe that conventional views of literacy do not leave space to acknowledge or appreciate the richness and complexity of hybrid textual constructions. The girl's semiotic creativity, based on the syncretism of family stories and a variety of other practices, went largely unnoticed. Because her stories failed to approximate the conventional genres privileged in school, the girl was seen as a literacy-deficient student. In contrast, in bringing a culturally responsive perspective to the girl's participation in literacy events, these researchers were able to give an alternative vision of her literacy development. With a focus on meaning-making dynamics, rather than on textual form, she can be conceived of as an achieving, capable and creative student. Thus, a culturally responsive perspective on the textual hybridity of minority students has a direct connection to critical perspectives that see in hybridity the potential to transform the knowledge, texts and identities of the mainstream curriculum.

Researchers on biliteracy (Au & Kawatami 1994; Dyson 1999; Gutiérrez & Stone 2000; Ritchie & Bhatia 1999; Moll 2000; among others) claim that, in conditions where the dominant cultural literacy is conceived as the only relevant knowledge to be acquired in schools, minority students are positioned on the boundary between the canonical literacy of the mainstream and the literacies of their communities. This boundary position is not a space filled with "imaginative interminglings and happy hybridities for us to celebrate" (Lavie & Swedenburg, as cited in Bhatia & Ram 2001: 14). Rather, the boundary positions are "minefields, mobile territories of constant clashes, ... zones of loss, alienation" and pain (ibid.). By living 'in-between', many immigrants identify themselves against nationalists, ethnics and indigenes of all kinds in an 'international culture' which, according to Bhabha (1994: 38), is "based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*". Therefore, borderland identities and their literacy practices are composed through a series of dialogical counterpoints, each set against the other and, especially, against the monologism of identity 'hailing' structures (Lowe 1994).

Willis (1995: 32-33), in this regard, describes the struggle of her son Jake in writing an essay for a national contest entitled "What it means to be an American":

> One of the contest's restrictions was that students should not mention the concept of race. My son thought this was an unfair and impossible task to complete, since his African American identity is synonymous with his being

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American. ... He is trying to come to grips with how he can express himself in a manner that is true to his "real self", and yet please his teachers and audience or readers who are, in effect, evaluating his culture, thinking, language, and reality.

The writing contest thus implies that to be an American means for hybridised/hyphenated identities such as African-American or Asian-American some kind of blissful marriage or integration between the hyphen (Bhatia & Ram 2001). However, the diasporic identity is so complex that a reflection on the 'real self' consisting of two cultural components inevitably leads to double consciousness and hence to an ambivalent writing position. The sociocultural experience of living 'in between' can not be expressed through the narrow lens of either Americanised or Africanised essentialism. Rather, both cultural components give the individual the potential of becoming a radically new identity. The making of a new identity in textual and literate practices in schools involves a struggle over meaning as minority students seek to articulate their sense of selfhood and the world from a position of living between the borders.

In connection with this, Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) identify the literacy learning trajectories of minority students not with a simple movement from the liminal to the dominant world view, episteme or meaning. Rather, these sociocultural researchers emphasise the constant struggle and negotiation between 'official' and 'unofficial' scripts. Negotiation between scripts, however, does not mean that new meanings are constructed freely, 'on the spot'. The disruptive and productive power of hybrid literacy is limited by "the authority of the supreme language [that] makes translation impossible" (Spivak 1993: 197). It is also in this sense that Lotman (1990: 131) points toward 'the proselytising mission' of the centre that "generates the norm ... actively invading 'incorrect' practice" and making it 'correct' according to those norms. In this role, official scripts (Gutiérrez & Stone 2000; Gutiérrez et al. 1995) constitute what Bourdieu (1998) calls educational strategies for reproducing cultural capital in educational settings. The mechanism of scholastic reproduction penetrates every classroom community and, as a rule, is biased toward students of privileged categories. Furthermore, the official scripts of the cultural mainstream carry out 'sorting operations', maintaining the preexisting order, that is, "the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1998: 20). To maintain this gap in educational settings means to replicate the asymmetrical relations of power legitimised in the broader society.

And yet semiotic hybridity, as an inherent feature of negotiation across differences, offers a possibility - though no certainty - of disrupting the power relations of dominance (Solsken et al. 2000). The gap between official and unofficial scripts, dominant and liminal literacy practices, produces contradiction and negativity. This gives rise to the counterscripts of

those students "who resist the normative institutional practices of the classroom, or whose local and cultural knowledge are often displaced" (Gutiérrez & Stone 2000: 156). According to bell hooks (1994: 168), most African-Americans see language standardisation as disempowering for those "who are just learning to speak, who are just learning to claim language as a place where [they] make [themselves] subject". Unofficial scripts emanate from a sense of such marginal cultural-political locations and are used as a starting point for intercultural translation and meaning negotiation. It is from the semiotic location on the margin that minority students, by focusing on the liminal moments and 'untranslatable' bits in their inter-textual practices, turn to "renovating and making critical an already existing activity" (Gramsci 1986: 331).

Semiotic hybridisation is not a strategy that dictates the direction of transformation: "hybrid agencies do not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty" (Bhabha 1996: 58). Rather, this agency, due to its displacement and 're-invention' in new cultural sites, deploys partial culture to construct a position in a dialogue with the cultural other. A hybrid agency can not refer to old conventional principles of ethnic identity: pre-given, irreducible, scripted, ahistorical cultural traits. Neither can it distance itself from dominant semiotic practices as a separate and independent entity. Instead, Bhabha (1994: 2) suggests that intercultural dialogue involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural-semiotic performances, that in turn produces a mutual recognition of cultural difference:

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.

As Bhabha argues in this passage, the liminal space is a hybrid site that witnesses the production - rather than just the reflection - of cultural meaning. The boundary between the marginal and the dominant becomes the place from which minorities engage in improvisational translation and creation of a new public sphere - the 'third space' - in which the intercultural dialogue is mutually enriching.

The formation of hybrid semiotic practices, then, can be located in the unscripted 'third space' in which students' and teacher's cultural interests become available to each other and hence open to critique and contestation (Gutiérrez et al. 1995). As such, hybrid literacy is a collective strategy to deliberately deconstruct racial-, social- or gender-supremacist discourses and textual representations through 'signifying' and improvisatory revision. The recognition of hybridity as a resource for literacy learning may change not only the dynamics of classroom literacy events but also relativise conventional norms, discourses,

and knowledge as markers of learning success. Because students in literacy events draw upon culturally (and interculturally) segmented literacy practices, they also identify themselves within the heterogeneity of sociocultural perspectives, histories, memories and modes of practice. Difference generates hybridity as the semiotic passage, as 'the connective tissue' in between the identifications with polarities. In this process the production of hybrid texts contests all claims to the stability of meaning and identity. 'Thirding' in literacy practices is a radical mutation through which a hyphenated identity, while maintaining the double consciousness and double reference to the marginal and the dominant, entirely transforms the logic of their articulation.

## Conclusion

In this chapter an attempt has been made to explore the third ontological category - spatiality - in the trialectic relationship of 'sociality-historicality-spatiality'. This category is particularly important for a systemic methodology of L2 and literacy learning research. The category of spatiality is understood here as the historical production of the cultural-semiotic sphere in which meaning-making practices occur. The Lotmanian concept of semiosphere is helpful in this respect for understanding the processes of bipolar asymmetry in intra- and intercultural communication. Boundary is a most important notion in the Tartu-Moscow school's project to analyse the process of cultural-semiotic dynamics, translation, hybridity and relations of power between systems of meaning. This is an intersemiotic space in which new meanings and cultural identities emerge, leading to rapid and slow, micro and macro transformations of the whole cultural-semiotic space.

This strategic move from within Vygotsky's cultural-historical perspective is justifiable for many reasons. First, by representing 'culture' as a polysystem of semiotic practices we can be more specific about the mediating role of 'culture' and semiotic resources in learning and intellectual development. These processes appear to be inseparable from and dependent on dialogical relations between various texts, memories, traditions and personae. In a word, difference is a resource and a necessary condition for learning dynamics. Second, the recognition of difference opens up a passage for understanding cultural-semiotic hybridity. This can be a metaphor for a critical understanding of meaning- and identity-making, in oscillation between different positions, perspectives, ideologies. Hybridity can offer a new understanding of L2 students' identities and literacies. Third, the recognition of cultural-semiotic difference and hybridity can be helpful in L2 research to grasp the restless dynamism in classroom communities 'hooked' into the semiotic circuits of the post-industrial culture. The concept of hybrid literacies is one promising dimension to explore in the new conditions of the 'chaotic' transnational and transcultural movement of texts, people and cultural-linguistic capitals.