

# Lifeworld Discourse, Translingualism, and Agency in a Discourse Genealogy of César Chávez’s Literacies

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## KEYWORDS

translingualism; lifeworld discourse; discourse genealogy; agency; repertoires; César Chávez; community activism; thresholds

## Introduction: Lifeworld Discourses and Translingual Literacies

**D**iscourse, as the term has been used by James Paul Gee, describes the combinations of saying-being-doing-feeling that allow us to recognize and get recognized by others as certain *whos* doing certain *whats*. According to Gee, we all have primary Discourses that reflect the languages learned at home and secondary Discourses that reflect the languages learned in public spheres; some secondary Discourses are dominant, others are marginalized. Discourses function as identity kits that allow us to take on and recognize all sorts of socially constructed subjectivities, such as migrant farmworker, college student, labor organizer, Catholic priest, police officer, etc. As a theoretical framework in literacy studies, the notion of Discourse foregrounds the principle that our ways of using language (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) are forms of social behavior that are tied to a range of activities—repertoires of saying-being-doing-feeling—that exceed the language itself.<sup>1</sup> We learn these practices through our interactions with others already embedded in the communities that we encounter and participate in throughout our life. While Discourses point to behaviors and activities, they represent structural systems or semiotic spaces that we can inhabit within specific social spheres (e.g., school, work, temple).

Central to the translingual project of the last decade has been a critique of New Literacy Studies and other second wave literacy projects for focusing too much on how literacies are tied to localized/stable social spheres (Canagarajah, “Negotiating” 43). This scholarship argues that our discursivity is shaped by vectors of time, as users’ language practices are hewed through a lifetime of use and emerge in relation to dynamically shifting rhetorical situations (Canagarajah, “Negotiating”; Cooper; Guerra and Shivers-McNair; Horner and Alvarez; Lu and Horner “Translingual Literacy”; Pennycook). Language practices, including established norms, are heterogeneous fluid activity systems marked by temporal dynamics, such as emergence, negotiation, and sedimentation (Cooper;

Guerra and Shivers-McNair; Lu and Horner “Translingual Literacy”; Pennycook). In a recent issue of this journal, Bruce Horner and Sara P. Alvarez make a strong case for this separation, arguing that translingualism represents a full epistemological break from second wave literacy projects by conceptualizing named languages (e.g., English or Spanish) as abstractions constructed by practices (the labor of language users) rather than as preexisting structures already marked as inside/outside the center/periphery of power (10). As Horner and Alvarez write, “There is no ‘there’ in language to defend, only a work in perpetual progress” constituted by the continual emergent (re)iteration of difference (23). Likewise, Eunjeong Lee and Suresh Canagarajah call for literacy researchers to examine how language and literacy are works in perpetual progress by “consider[ing] how people’s histories and socialization over diverse scales of time and space develop transcultural dispositions that facilitate their translingual practices” (26).

According to the translingual view, difference in the (re)iteration of language formations does not indicate creative resistance to entrenched power or the creation of error, but is rather the norm of all language acts and indicates the emergent and negotiated nature of discourse practices. Yet the question of what the translingual difference entails has been questioned by scholars in the field sympathetic to the larger aims of translingualism (Gilyard; Cushman). Keith Gilyard argues that when we adopt a strong view of language as an abstraction constituted by practice (activity/performance) that emphasizes the sameness of difference, we risk flattening the very meaning of that difference. When translinguality focuses on “a sort of linguistic everyperson,” even high achieving students, then composition studies has no problems to address (285). Gilyard further argues that such a flattening of difference risks dismissing the cataloging of the competencies of marginalized speakers in favor of a heightened focus on performance (287). Ellen Cushman also questions the scope of difference in translinguality, arguing that social justice projects in composition cannot succeed unless they “generate pluriversal understandings, values, and practices” (239) which would allow us to exceed the binaries of imperialism (e.g., insider/outsider, center/periphery) by dwelling in the borders (240). Cushman further writes, “Understanding the differences within difference” can allow us to delink the social hierarchies indexed on language systems that are necessary for imperialism (239), and “By creating pluriversal contexts, values, and purposes for meaning making” for dispositions and practices, we can not only occupy empowered/marginalized spaces but begin to “dwell in the borders created by the imperial difference” (240).

Although Gee’s work falls under the second wave literacy projects critiqued here, his Discourse model—and more specifically his concept of lifeworld Discourse—is well suited to respond to emergent theories of literacy because it emphasizes language practices within activity systems. Discourses describe ways of saying-being-doing-feeling that are acquired over time, much like the notion of repertoires in translingual scholarship, which refer to the bounded sets of activities that inform emergent literacy practice (Canagarajah, “Translingual Practice”; Leonard, *Writing on the Move*; see also Garcia and Wei). While Gee’s emphasis on mastery of secondary Discourses bounded to specific social spheres (school, work, temple) represents the type of over-emphasis on stable language systems critiqued by translingual scholars, the overlooked notion of lifeworld Discourse in Gee’s work aligns well with the translingual orientations toward fluidity, sedimentation, emergence,

pluriversal contexts, and diverse scales of time.<sup>2</sup>

In the following, I activate the lifeworld Discourse conceptual framework in an analytical approach that I call a Discourse genealogy in order to trace out the palimpsestic emergence and blending of Discursive competencies throughout labor and community organizer César Chávez's life. By attending to Chávez's lifeworld Discourse, Discourse genealogy enables a view of how discourse practices contribute to the sedimentation of repertoires and emergent discursive agency through

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archival research. I adapt lifeworld Discourse in order to theorize (1) how Discourse competencies are cultivated through the sedimentation of discourse practices over time, and (2) how actors occupy thresholds or dwell on borders while they draw on repertoires sedimented through prior experience in response to emergent rhetorical situations.

As Gee explains, lifeworld Discourse refers to our primary Discourse from the vantage point

of adulthood, after it has “undergone many influences” from our experience in the world, endlessly moving from scene to scene (216). Just as each Discourse has its own history of practice, so does each discursive agent, and the notion of a lifeworld Discourse attempts to capture these interleaving dynamics. As we come up in the world, we acquire a primary Discourse in our home community, and as we go public, we engage with all sorts of secondary Discourses (each affording a range of socio-political power) by enacting the practices available to us from the repertoire of our prior experiences in the myriad social spheres and engagements we have encountered.

These repertoires of practice constitute our lifeworld Discourse, and they blend, combine, and coalesce in dynamic ways, unique to each individual's experiences—often leaving deep impressions on how we activate language in social scenes—but always shaping our readiness to act in discursive situations, as we continually negotiate and combine language resources to achieve specific goals and purposes in our communicative engagements.<sup>3</sup> Lifeworld Discourse describes our readiness to act through language and literacy in rhetorical situations by accounting for the range of the pluriversal sedimented Discourses we've accumulated through prior practice and experience. Rather than conceptualizing actors as enacting empowered/marginalized Discourses (although individuals certainly take up Discourses that afford a range of socio-political power), lifeworld Discourse highlights the palimpsestic nature of Discourse practice over a lifetime and allows us to trace out how actors may dwell in Discursive borders by using emergent connections between Discourses to reframe practices to new ends. When we occupy thresholds between social spheres or Discourses, we may enact, blend, extend, or otherwise modify our sedimented repertoires in ways that allow us to

respond to emergent rhetorical situations while affording the construction or (re)iteration of socially recognizable positions or Discourses; this process represents the cultivation of Discursive agency.

In the following analysis, I look at Chávez's emergent lifeworld Discourses from birth in 1927 through the late 1950s, up to the point at which he began to organize the migrant farmworkers in Oxnard, California (1957-58) under the auspices of the Community Service Organization (CSO), a foundation that worked to organize Mexican-American communities throughout California in order to address the systemic failure of regular civic government to address the needs and concerns of this population. Using textual analysis of Chávez's writings and recorded recollections, I show how one thread of Chávez's lifeworld Discourse—responding to social injustice—binds together a number of Chávez's repertoires across

secondary Discourses, forming a lifeworld Discourse. I take up César Chávez as a case study for examining lifeworld Discourse because his life is marked by a history of dwelling on and moving through borders of power and there is a record of nearly daily writings describing his work as a community activist in the 1950s that is further supplemented by a rich oral history record.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on Chávez's early life and discourse practices, this argument contributes to existing scholarship on Chávez's rhetorical career that demonstrates how Chávez “consciously gave discourse a

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central place in his worldview” (Hammerback and Jensen 3), for critical approaches to Chávez's work frequently gloss over his work in community organizing during the 1950s (the focus of this analysis) in order to consider his more historically significant work in organizing migrant farmworkers in the 1960s through the end of his life in 1993.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, a case study focusing on Chávez is generative for larger understandings of lifeworld Discourse because his experience shows how the various social languages (Discourses) acquired throughout a lifetime are knitted together. As Bakhtin puts it, “languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways” (291). Much translingual scholarship has focused on the ways in which discursive resources move between national languages (e.g., Spanish, English, Chinese, etc.) in a globalized world (Canagarajah, “Negotiating”; Lee and Canagarajah; Leonard, *Writing on the Move*; Otsuji and Pennycook). My analysis of Chávez's work emphasizes the intersections of social languages by attending to how repertoires acquired in one social sphere may

emerge as a potential for action in other social spheres. By looking at Chávez's Discursive genealogy, we can see how social languages and their constitutive practices sedimented in our lifeworld Discourse through experience don't exclude each other—enacting one Discourse or another isn't a matter of wearing different hats or costumes (identity kits) as if one is adopting entirely new identities—instead, our competencies with Discourses are forged, at least in part, by extending or blending our prior sedimented repertoires with new practices in social spheres as we pursue alternative agendas, purposes, and social identities. To return to Bakhtin, “all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they may all be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement each other, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically” (291-2). Our discursive capacities are intertwined, even when their affordances for social or cultural power are vastly different.

The lifeworld Discourse framework helps to reveal how these Discourses or social languages are interrelated through experience and practice, and Chávez's experience is an important site for understanding lifeworld Discourse because of the extended interconnections between his various experiences as part of a range of distinct communities, including landowning farmers, migrant farmworkers, Mexican-Americans, Roman Catholic Church, CSO Organization. The repertoires learned even in some of our earliest engagements with society become resources that we enact, extend, and blend with other practices throughout our lifetimes as we cultivate capacities to act and enact social Discourses and identities.

This project is based on two sets of data. First, I analyze Chávez's daily activity reports produced as part of his role as a CSO organizer between 1954 and 1959. These unpublished documents are part of the United Farm Worker's Collection, which is housed at the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor Archives at Wayne State University.<sup>6</sup> In my study of this archive, I focused on material that was typed by Chávez or written in his script (his wife Helen helped draft daily memos throughout this period, and I did not include memos written in her script). Using an inductive coding method, I focused on passages that described how Chávez used texts in his work as a CSO organizer. This essay addresses the findings related to one of the codes that emerged through my analysis: using texts to help others. Second, I draw on oral histories conducted by Jacques Levy with Chávez during the early 1970s (and published contemporaneously in *La Causa*). In this text, Levy acts as an archivist assembling transcriptions of Chávez's oral interviews, which were selected and compiled by Levy into book form, but without any editorial narrative synthesizing or otherwise commenting on Chávez's recollections. Like other scholars writing about Chávez, I treat this text as a primary source.

I trace out Chávez's lifeworld Discourse in this analysis by identifying key moments in his Discursive history where he occupies thresholds of power, dwelling on borders between Discourses by combining various resources from across the stratified Discourses with which he's engaged throughout his experiences. Focusing on these moments provides a perspective on how the sedimentation of Discourse practices cultivates a readiness to act in response to emergent rhetorical situations. Thus, in the following, I examine Chávez's adolescence, which was split between landownership in Arizona and migrant farmwork in California, Chávez's first formal exposure to scholarly texts on social

justice through his mentorship by Father Donald McDonnell, and his practice of helping others as a community organizer. The final section analyzes this Discourse genealogy to show how each Discourse practice sedimented in Chávez's lifeworld Discourse represents a potential for action or readiness potential that affords Chávez new agential resources.

## Discourse Genealogy And Lifeworld Discourse

In order to analyze Discourse practices with a focus on how literacies change across the grain of one's life, I turn to Vicki Tolar Burton's concept of literacy genealogy. Burton uses literacy genealogy to organize the archival analysis in her work on the Methodist founder John Wesley's literacies by tracing the literacy practices in Wesley's family, including his maternal grandfather, parents, and siblings. Burton situates the literacy genealogy as a genre closely related to literacy narratives, as it "describes how acts and practices of reading and writing function in an individual's life, a family, a community, a culture" with particular attention paid to "issues of power, access, and agency" (33). Burton's use of literacy genealogy illuminates both how the "roots of [Wesley's] spiritual literacy in early Methodism lie in the histories" of his parents' literacies (33), as well as a view of practice in a certain social class during a specific historical moment (62). Burton's work illustrates how specific sets of textual practices, including a range of reading, writing, and pedagogical practices, extend beyond the capacities of one individual into the individual's network of friends and family members.

The notion of genealogy as a method of historical inquiry resounds with Foucault's genealogical approach (though Burton does not explicitly make this connection). Foucault's approach analyzes the disparate constituencies that imbue the body with meaning, using a vertical analysis that seeks out the strata that collectively constitute the body, thus focusing primarily on the historically contingent conditions that have formed the body. Accordingly, Burton's genealogy highlights the wide range of literacy practices evident in Wesley's family and demonstrates through her analysis how those practices shaped and made possible Wesley's work in developing the Methodist Church. This vertical or rhizomatic analysis contrasts with a horizontal analysis that removes discontinuity in order to locate the causal flow of history from one event to the next. A genealogical approach to history urges us to articulate the various strata that make up the body of the thing being analyzed and to interrogate the subdivisions and relations among the strata. Thus, Foucault writes, "the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations" ("Archaeology" 5). Foucault's genealogical method highlights discontinuities or dissonances between historical strata in order to analyze how disparate lines of power inflect the object of analysis.

My first move in adapting Burton's genealogical analysis as a method for investigating lifeworld Discourse is to shift the focus of the framework to consider how individuals learn and acquire not only literacies, but broader sets of semiotic practices. As Gee explains, a given Discourse "is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable

identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities” (171). Gee’s project is useful because it highlights how practices compose identities and activities. He further argues that we all acquire a primary Discourse, which is the home Discourse practiced by our family early in life: “Our primary Discourse gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular language (our ‘everyday language’), the language in which we speak and act as ‘everyday’ (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity” (173). As we grow up, though, we are exposed to social situations outside the home where various secondary Discourses get enacted (such as church, school, and other public spheres). Gee further argues that we acquire some of these secondary Discourses through close relationships with other individuals who have already mastered these secondary Discourses; we must learn other secondary Discourses, however, because we have no access to deep relationships with those who have already mastered the target relationship. Throughout our life, we may combine, switch between, and even shed away any given Discourse, for Discourses are mutable, ever shifting ways of recognizing others and getting recognized by others as certain *whos* doing certain *whats*.

The notion of Discourse allows me to expand the scope of Burton’s literacy genealogy to consider how individuals’ “ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies” get indexed to specific Discourses. Further, at another level, the genealogical analysis seeks to understand how an individual’s array of Discursive resources acquired through a lifetime emerge as possibilities for action in emergent situations as practices indexed to socially recognizable identities. In this way, a Discourse genealogy may focus on a single individual’s literacy practices (as Burton does) within a broader matrix of textuality, but also the range of Discourses (that are taken up, acquired, learned, practiced, (re)combined or dispensed by the individual) that accumulate to constitute a lifeworld Discourse. Discourse genealogy, as a methodology attending to the framework of lifeworld Discourse, affords a theorization of emergent discursive agency through archival research.

While Gee’s more widely used notions of primary/secondary Discourses emphasize the kind of indexing of social hierarchies on language systems noted by Cushman, lifeworld Discourse points to a palimpsestic sedimentation of the myriad Discourses we all encounter and for which we cultivate varying levels of competency. For Gee, lifeworld Discourse is akin to our primary Discourse after it has experienced countless shifts and changes from exposure to and influence by the various other Discourses we encounter and practice. Gee distinguishes lifeworld Discourse from secondary Discourses by arguing that our lifeworld Discourse is a sort of “non-specialized” Discourse (a term he also uses to describe primary Discourse), in contrast to the specialized social languages or Discourses like priest, police officer, and protestor (173). Gee writes, “Our lifeworld Discourse is the way that we use language, feel and think, act and interact, and so forth, in order to be an ‘everyday’ (non-specialized) person” (174). This framing posits a problematic separation between specialized and non-specialized Discourses, and it’s hard to imagine how any of us are not at some point or another engaged in one sort of identity or socially recognizable activity or another. Although Gee notes that Discourses are not “tight boxes with neat boundaries” (173), they are often conceptualized as bounded to specific social spheres. Furthermore, distinctions between specialized Discourses

(secondary) and non-specialized Discourses (primary/lifeworld) do not provide for clear movement of practices between social languages.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, I am interested in adapting Gee's notion of a lifeworld Discourse to translingual scholarship because it emphasizes the dimension of time and sedimentation across a lifetime of discursive practice while preserving the useful notion that we accrue socially contextualized repertoires of behavior as we move through distinct social spheres.

The notion of lifeworld Discourse provides a way to understand how literacy repertoires or Discourses are accumulated as sedimented resources for emergent discursive agency without categorizing these resources as constituent elements of named languages. Rather, lifeworld Discourse highlights how individuals carry with themselves a range of resources, embedded as repertoires through sedimentation and experience, that may be negotiated, hybridized, and otherwise enacted

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in emergent rhetorical situations. Such enactments emerge from scenes rich with ideological territoriality and positioning and may serve in the construction of specific socio-cultural identities, but are not limited to specific Discourses, or ideological categories of socio-cultural positioning. Thus, rather than reifying seemingly stable boundaries around each of secondary Discourses, the concept

of a lifeworld Discourse may help us to track how we deploy, combine, and iterate the discursive repertoires acquired through our experiences as we move through various scenes across the grain of a lifetime. Although Gee characterizes both primary and lifeworld Discourses as non-specialized, the boundaries between secondary Discourses (specialized social languages) and primary Discourse (our first language practices) are mutable, as repertoires acquired in one may be enacted, recontextualized, or revised in another. Gee gives lots of space for movement and influence between secondary Discourses but posits primary/lifeworld Discourses as separate sets of practice. The analysis in the next section suggests that repertoires thread through various Discourses, and the concept of lifeworld Discourse represents a way to mark that synthesis throughout a life.

## Translingualism, Literacy Repertoires, and Lifeworld Discourse

The translingual paradigm has emerged as a response and resistance to both monolingualism and multilingualism by emphasizing (1) linguistic difference as a resource for agency and meaning in language acts rather than a problem, error, or deviation that limits meaning, and (2) by highlighting language varieties as fluid resources rather than stable bounded semiotic spaces (Guerra and Shivers-McNair; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur; Horner and Tetreault; Lu and Horner, “Translingual”). Crucial to much of translingualism's critique of previous language and literacy models has been its



focus on the temporal dimension of language and literacy practices (Canagarajah, “Translingual”; Guerra and Shivers-McNair; Pennycook). Lu and Horner argue that a spatial-temporal framework for conceptualizing literacies allows us to see difference as the norm, rather than as a deviation from a stable set of discourse conventions, and it further allows us to mark the (re)iteration of discourse practices in emergent literacy events as an agentive process that continually reforms discourses and subjectivities (“Translingual” 592). As Lu and Horner write, “Writers can thus be seen not as writing in a language or context, but as always writing, or rewriting, language, context, and subjectivity” (591). Likewise, Pennycook explains, “To look at language as a practice is to view language as an activity rather than a structure, as a something we do rather than a system we draw on, as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an abstract entity” (2). Gee’s work on Discourse, like other work in the New Literacy Studies, conceptualizes our literacies or Discourses as multiple sets of abilities that get enacted in specific social spheres. Discourses are thus textual regimes that we draw on in specific social settings. The underlying organizational emphasis on spatiality allows us to consider how individuals inhabit, move between, and combine Discourses.

However, Discourses and their concomitant subjectivities are not carried around in ideational containers tied to specific social spheres, but are emergent within their context, continually (re)iterated out of the available situational and linguistic resources that arise within the discourse event. As A. Suresh Canagarajah argues, “Meaning has to be co-constructed through collaborative strategies, treating grammars and texts as affordances rather than containers for meaning. Interlocutors draw from other affordances, too, such as the setting objects, gestures, and multisensory resources from the ecology” (“Negotiating” 43). Meaning gets negotiated in the global contact zone, as interlocutors work to align the discursive codes they bring with them in conjunction with the array of situational affordances that emerge through the rhetorical engagement. This emphasis on a negotiated emergence of meaning underlines the temporal and performative aspects of discourse practices that is central to translingual scholarship and its critique of situated literacy models. The sedimentation of literacy practices through experience cultivates a range of semiotic resources available to us, emergent potentials for creating meaning in discursive scenes.

By underlining language, literacies, and discourses as performative activities that emerge through and by our practice, translingualism gives value to the reiteration of sameness and differences over time in a process of sedimentation. One of the problems with multilingual or multicultural models of language, Otsuji and Pennycook argue, is that they hold that individuals are constituted by multiple literacies or discourses; these paradigms pluralize discourses but do not account for the constitutive role of our fixed identities and languages in the pluralization of discourse. Responding to these limits, Otsuji and Pennycook adopt the notion of metrolingualism, which they explain “can be conceived as the paradoxical practice and space where fixity, discreteness, fluidity, hybridity, locality and globality coexist and co-constitute each other. This is different from multilingualism, which is either based on a pluralisation of fixed linguistic categories, or hybridisation, which cannot accord any legitimacy to the mobilization of fixity” (252). Otsuji and Pennycook’s metrolingualism supports the performance of Discourse through an emergent and negotiated practice that is constituted not only by the interlocutor’s available semiotic resources, but by a range of human and nonhuman

ecological actors in the rhetorical situation.<sup>8</sup>

Rebecca Lorimer Leonard describes these types of emergent and negotiated language resources as literate repertoires, which are “the complex cluster of reading, writing, listening, and speaking strategies and experiences” that we use to write; the concept of repertoire emphasizes for Lorimer Leonard the “dynamic sets of literate practices learned in specific, lived social contexts” that we are always in the process of accumulating (*Writing* 7). For Lorimer Leonard, repertoires describe the sets of literacy practices that have accumulated or sedimented as resources available for use in discursive situations, but they can also refer to “metalinguistic understandings and language ideologies” (*Writing* 7). Repertoires may be recontextualized (or not), for as Lorimer Leonard explains, certain literacy resources “do or do not move smoothly among languages, writers, or readers.” Thus, Leonard describes repertoires as potentially fluid, fixed, or frictive (7). These repertoires are acquired and enacted through a process that Leonard terms rhetorical attunement and that draws attention to the in-process “sensibility fostered over time, across a spectrum of language and geographic boundaries” through countless engagements of negotiation and enactment of our literacy repertoires (“Multilingual” 230). Attunement here refers to our sense of how to adapt prior literacy repertoires in response to emergent socio-cultural contexts.

Repertoires refer to the specific discursive facilities that we obtain through experiences of negotiated engagement, that we accumulate and sediment as resources that we may move and decontextualize (or not) in diverse emergent rhetorical situations. In “Translingual Practice as Spatial Repertoires,” Canagarajah writes that spatial repertoires “link the repertoires formed through individual life trajectories to the particular places in which the linguistic resources are deployed” (Pennycook and Otsuji qtd in Canagarajah 36). Canagarajah extends Pennycook and Otsuji’s model, arguing that spatial repertoires are not brought to a rhetorical situation whole cloth, but are collaboratively “assembled *in situ* ... in the manner of distributed practice” (“Translingual” 37). While these repertoires emerge through distributed practice across a network of human and nonhuman actors in a discursive situation, they are not entirely groundless, as interlocutors may still distinguish one language (and its resources) from another. However, as Canagarajah explains, “certain words index certain places and communities, and develop identities as distinctly labeled or territorialized languages. Indexicals sediment over time to gain an identity as belonging to one language or the other, with specific grammatical status in that language” (“Translingual” 37). Canagarajah defines proficiency as “the ability to align diverse semiotic and spatial resources for successful activity,” and argues that communicative proficiency entails the ability for “individuals to situate themselves in the spatial ecology, not only to align the diverse resources, but also to be shaped by them” (“Translingual” 50). Canagarajah thus distinguishes between the process of sedimenting literacy practices as repertoire from the territorialization or emplacement of individuals in social ecologies in which they enact socially situated activities.

I find Lorimer Leonard’s use of repertoires to describe the sedimentation of dynamic sets of literacy practices that may be moved across contextual boundaries to be helpful. But I also agree with Canagarajah’s argument that spatial repertoires may be tied to social spheres through emergent processes of enactment. While Lorimer Leonard’s use of repertoires seems to relate to the ways of

saying-being-doing-feeling that comprise Discourses, Canagarajah's emphasis on the indexification of repertoires to position ourselves within spatial ecologies resonates with the notion of Discourse in Gee's work: we learn, acquire, and use a range of socially situated activities (repertoires of saying-being-doing-feeling) in order to situate ourselves within social situations/ecologies. We acquire repertoires through our sedimented histories of practices, and these repertoires may be enacted in rhetorical situations in order to achieve specific identities or emplacements. Following Lorimer Leonard, repertoires are moveable and changeable, and thus they may be used to constitute a range of Discourses as they emerge as potentials for meaningful action. Thus, I use Lorimer Leonard's concept of repertoire to characterize sets of saying-being-doing-feeling that are sedimented through the lived experience of social engagement in a lifetime of practice and that may be enacted in a range of contexts. I use Gee's term Discourse to refer to the process of emplacement described by spatial repertoire. Discourses are constituted by a complex of repertoires (ways of saying-being-doing-feeling) that can afford certain socially constructed identities/ideologies by indexing them to discrete practices (repertoires).

When we look at the history of a life, we can see how certain repertoires for action repeat and emerge in situations markedly different than the conditions of their acquisition. These sets of activities are learned through sedimented routines of repeated practice, resulting in a readiness to draw on our repertoires in scenes of negotiated practice with others. While Gee's notions of primary and secondary Discourses draw attention to the social spheres in which we engage with and acquire various repertoires or Discourses, lifeworld Discourse highlights the range of repertoires and Discourses available to us as possibilities for engaging in emergent rhetorical situations. Translingual scholarship opens up the structural boundaries of secondary Discourses, highlighting how

***“Translingual scholarship opens up the structural boundaries of secondary Discourses, highlighting how Discourse acquisition and practice are emergent phenomena dynamically shaped by the context in which one's varied language repertoires are enacted.”***

Discourse acquisition and practice are emergent phenomena dynamically shaped by the context in which one's varied language repertoires are enacted. Retaining elements from Gee's activity-oriented Discourse model, however, allows us still to acknowledge and trace the ways in which new repertoires get connected with older repertoires as individuals move through social spheres and practice their associated secondary Discourses. Making these connections opens space for pluriversal differences, allowing individuals to dwell in borders, to occupy the thresholds between spheres of socio-political and cultural power. The concept of a lifeworld Discourse allows us to retain a sense of the power that one's primary Discourse has in shaping our social interactions by pointing to the ways in which we expand and transform our ways (repertoires) of saying-being-doing-feeling to fit the emergent situations in which we must negotiate identity, meaning, and action. This multifaceted picture of one individual's Discourse genealogy allows us to better understand at a given historical moment how the array of Discourses at hand makes possible specific socially recognizable responses to specific

social situations.

## César Chávez's Lifeworld Discourse

Chávez's childhood was split between two different worlds. On the one hand, Chávez lived the first eleven years of his life in a close-knit community that largely consisted of his immediate and extended family on a forty-acre family-owned farm situated alongside the Colorado River in the North Gila Valley just outside Yuma, an agricultural center tucked in the dry south-west corner of Arizona along the Mexican and California borders. On the other hand, Chávez and his family lost their home in the depression and migrated to California, where they subsisted as itinerant farmworkers, following the harvest up and down California's central valley. In Arizona, Chávez was part of a stable, close-knit family-based community, who worked on a large parcel of family-owned land. In California, Chávez rarely stayed in a location more than a few weeks due to the ever-moving harvest and endured poverty accented by a persistent and ironic hunger, as the family harvested boundless produce from California's fertile irrigated farmland. After he left the Navy at the end of World War II, Chávez continued to do migrant farm work and other work as he started a family in San Jose, where he came into contact with two mentors. Through his work with Fr. Donald McDonnell and Fred Ross, Chávez began organizing Latin/x communities in California.

### *The first years: Adolescence from Arizona to California*

Throughout his youth, Chávez was heavily influenced by his mother, who, as Chávez puts it, "kept the family together" through her use of *dichos* (proverbs) and *consejos* (advice). "She would say, 'It takes two to fight.' That was her favorite. 'It takes two to fight, and one can't do it alone.' She had all kinds of proverbs for that" (Levy 18-9). Chávez explains, "When I look back, I see her sermons [*dichos* and *consejos*] had tremendous impact on me. I didn't know it was nonviolence then, but after reading Gandhi, St. Francis, and other exponents of nonviolence [as an adult in the 1950s], I began to clarify that in my mind" (18). Juana fostered not only repertoires like *nonviolent action*, but also *self-sacrifice in the service of others*. For instance, Juana's patron saint was St. Eduvigis—a Polish duchess who gave up her material possessions in service of the poor—and every year on St. Eduvigis' day, Juana

would go out purposely to look for someone in need, give him something, and never take anything in return. If a man was selling pencils, she would give him some money but wouldn't take a pencil. She would look for people who were hungry to come to the house. Usually they would offer to do some work, like chop wood, in exchange for a meal, but she would refuse because, she said, the gift was invalid. (25-6)

Servicing others without concern for her own compensation was central to her spiritual practice. Later, the Chávez family were forced to seek migrant farm work after losing their land in the depression. Once they figured out how to succeed as migrant farmworkers through much trial and error, Juana would help out their fellow farmworkers new to the migrant stream. For instance, she would pick up entire families and would lead the Chávez family in helping these strangers learn the

system in a mentor-type relationship. Chávez recalls,

After we sort of gave them an apprenticeship, they felt confident, and they'd take off. My mother did a lot of this work. I didn't realize how important it was until years later. I didn't even understand what she was doing. In fact, I didn't particularly like the idea very much. The things she did, being unlettered, were really amazing, just dealing with the problems and trying to help people. (Levy 70)

For Juana, this repertoire of *self-sacrifice in the service of others*, even when she and her family had little to offer, was a rhetorical and material practice that enabled her to express a deeply held spiritual worldview. Juana's practices fostered a repertoire for *self-sacrifice in the service of others* in Chávez that weaves through a number of other Discourses he acquires and enacts throughout his life, extending and blending with other repertoires in his lifeworld Discourse.

The Chávez family practices fostered other repertoires, as well, including the repertoire *standing up to injustice*. For instance, Chávez describes long hot summer days on the family farm in Yuma. In the evenings, Chávez explains, the family would gather for barbecues and stories about how Chávez's grandfather "escaped from the hacienda, how no one would speak out for their rights...[They] learned that when you felt something was wrong, you stood up to it" (Levy 33). The repertoire of *standing up to injustice* was woven into the fabric of Chávez's family-based Discourse, later becoming a recurring theme as he moved through other social spheres. For example, Chávez recalls several incidents in which a family member would identify an injustice in one of the California migrant camps, prompting the whole family to drop their work and walk out, regardless of consequences:

If any family felt something was wrong and stopped working, we immediately joined them even if we didn't know them....When we felt something was wrong, we stood up against it. We did that many, many times. We were constantly fighting against things that most people would probably accept because they didn't have that kind of life we had in the beginning [in Yuma], that strong family life and family ties which we would not let anyone break...if one of us felt very strongly there was something wrong, my dad said, "Okay, let's go." There was no question. Our dignity meant more than money. I remember one time when it was a little hard to quit—we needed the money—but we didn't consider that. Our attitude was, we have to do it, and we accepted it. (Levy 78-9)

The practices outlined here illustrate how Chávez's family blended repertoires of *self-sacrifice in the service of others* and *standing up to injustice*, even when those actions might compromise the family's material well-being (e.g., loss of income or loss of other resources like food and shelter). The Chávez family's readiness to act in ways that resisted the injustice of the working conditions they faced was shaped by the lessons embedded in Juana's spiritually grounded commitment to service, family stories told during the summer evening gatherings in Yuma, and the close family-based community that forged the strong family ties that Chávez emphasizes.

Together, these repertoires form an important part of Chávez's primary Discourse, and as he moves through adulthood, as he moves through other social spheres and their Discourses, Chavez's repertoires extend, blend, and hybridize with other and, in doing so, inflect his cultivation of those secondary Discourses. Throughout his life, Chávez straddled multiple worlds, occupying thresholds

situated at the interstices between the interwoven strata of his various Discourses, such as in the adolescent period of his life when he was enmeshed in both landowning farmworker and migrant farmworker Discourses. From the position of these thresholds, Chávez had available to him certain potentials for action shaped by the sedimented repertoires and their capacity for enactment in the context of a Discourse and rhetorical situation. Occupying these thresholds enables the enactment of pluriversal contexts and meanings within a discursive act.

The sedimentation of experience encodes practices like helping feed others, mentoring families new to migrant farm work, and leaving a worksite to protest unjust labor practices into repertoires such as *self-sacrifice in the service of others* that can emerge as potentials for action in response to emergent situations. Discourses describe the socially recognizable identities that we enact as we pursue social actions or fulfill purposes and goals in social situations. Repertoires are the sedimented ways of saying-being-doing-feeling that are available to us as potentials for action in an emergent situation. Thus, the enactment of repertoires constitutes and colors the Discourses we seek to occupy. For instance, we can see how the repertoire of *self-sacrifice in the service of others* is grounded as part of Juana's Catholic Discourse, but it also emerges as her (and her family's) identity as migrant farmworkers. This blending of repertoires across Discourses and social spheres happens at thresholds—the interstices between Discourses—in which previously sedimented repertoires emerge

***“This blending of repertoires across Discourses and social spheres happens at thresholds – the interstices between Discourses – in which previously sedimented repertoires emerge as potentials for action. As individuals dwell in the borders of Discourses, the practice of enacting repertoires in a different social sphere affords new potentials for meaning.”***

as potentials for action. As individuals dwell in the borders of Discourses, the practice of enacting repertoires in a different social sphere affords new potentials for meaning. For instance, while Juana's repertoire of *self-sacrifice in the service of others* in Yuma entailed singular actions like feeding others without accepting a gift in return, but when deployed in the context

of migrant farmwork, *self-sacrifice in the service of others* emerges with a new dimension of meaning in the form of mentoring that did not occur on the family farm in Yuma.

#### *The early 1950s: Learning to organize communities*

Around 1952, while in his mid-twenties, Chávez moved to a barrio in San Jose called *Sal Si Puedes* (get out if you can) where he first met his two key mentors: Father Donald McDonnell and the community organizer Fred Ross. Chávez's work with Fr. McDonnell was both an apprenticeship and a teacher-student relationship. Fr. McDonnell, who was part of a group of liberal Catholic ministers dedicated to social justice and known as the “mission band” (Ferriss and Sandoval 46), came to *Sal Si Puedes* because there was no Catholic church in this Mexican-American barrio (Levy 89). Fr. McDonnell was working to teach the farmworkers around San Jose about “the church's

social doctrines on labor organizing and social justice, hoping that they would begin to organize themselves to improve their lot” (Griswold del Castillo and García 23). Chávez’s education from Fr. McDonnell is an outgrowth of this larger mission undertaken by the priest and dovetails with Chávez’s upbringing. As Chávez recalls,

That’s when I started reading the Encyclicals, St. Francis [of Assisi, patron saint of the Franciscans, an order of Catholic priests dedicated to serving the poor], and Gandhi and having the case for attaining social justice explained. As Father McDonnell followed social justice legislation very closely, he introduced me to the transcripts of the Senate LaFollette Committee hearings held in 1940 in Los Angeles. I remember three or four volumes on agriculture, describing the Associated Farmers, their terror and strikebreaking tactics, and their financing by banks, utilities, and big corporation. (Levy 91)

These readings started to “form a picture” for Chávez that connected spirituality with political action aimed at social justice. Chávez describes this emerging picture:

When I read the biography of St. Francis of Assisi, I was moved when he went before the Moslem prince and offered to walk through fire to end a bloody war. And I still remember how he talked and made friends with a wolf that killed several men. St. Francis was a gentle and humble man. In the St. Francis biography, there was a reference to Gandhi and others who practiced nonviolence. That was a theme that struck a very responsive chord, probably because of the foundation laid by mother. So the next thing I read after St. Francis was the Louis Fischer biography of Gandhi. (Levy 91).

Together, Chávez’s recollection of reading with Fr. McDonnell suggests that Chávez was actively making connections with his previous experiences—perhaps reflecting on and gaining new perspectives on his mother’s non-violent spirituality and contextualizing his own experience as a migrant worker in a broader socio-political framework. Chávez’s readiness potential to recognize and respond to social injustice was already highly developed through the cultivation of the *stand up to injustice* repertoire. Further, as Chávez indicates by connecting this work with the foundations laid by his mother, Chávez appears to have some meta-awareness of his own ideological/Discursive history. But given that these reflective comments were recorded after his work with Fr. McDonnell, it is difficult to say with certainty that this meta-awareness shaped his ability to expand his potentials for action. Yet I would argue here that Fr. McDonnell extended this readiness to act (understood here as a capacity to identify, analyze, and respond to injustices in the fields) by folding in new Discourses—new strata—of theological, political, and historical Discourses, as these hybridizations would become closely aligned with Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse through his work in the CSO, and later in the National Farm Workers union and the United Farm Workers union.

But Fr. McDonnell’s lessons were not all directly rooted in conversations about texts. In one powerful example that would have a significant impact on Chávez as an organizer, using legal texts to help others, Fr. McDonnell showed Chávez how texts can enable agency. Chávez recalls that a Mexican woman who attended Fr. McDonnell’s masses needed help when her mother died, since the family could not afford burial services. Chávez’s first response was to solicit donations from the community and see whether Fr. McDonnell could persuade some of the Catholic Charities to help

with the cost. Since this had happened a few times in the past, Chávez assumed that Fr. McDonnell would simply agree to follow this plan of action. Instead, Fr. McDonnell suggested an alternative plan that they claim the body and bury it themselves, outside of the expensive funerary industry.

When Chávez, Fr. McDonnell, and the daughter went to the hospital to claim the body, the hospital worker stated that the three of them could not recover the body and that they would have to hire an undertaker. Chávez recalls that “Father McDonnell said no, and he pulled out the health and welfare code” and pointed out to the hospital worker that the next of kin could claim the body. Fr. McDonnell’s act (repertoire) of *citing texts to claim legal agency* “started an episode that lasted about three hours” in which the question of whether the next of kin could claim the body moved up the ladder from the hospital supervisor, to the administrator, county counsel, district attorney, and finally, the California state attorney general, Pat Brown, who said, “Sure they have a right to claim the body” (Levy 90).

Chávez would later use this same repertoire, *citing texts to claim legal agency*, in the CSO and the United Farm Workers (91). As Mario García argues, Fr. McDonnell’s education of Chávez “reinforced many of the same principles that his mother and grandmother had taught him: nonviolence, helping those in need, sacrificing for others, respect for others, and for one’s self” (Levy 8-9). The repertoires Chávez acquired from his mother are tied to the repertoires Chávez learned from Fr. McDonnell by similar themes, yet they use different tactics to fulfill their shared objectives. For instance, Chávez’s mother showed him how to sacrifice himself to serve the poor and hungry members of the community outside of formal social institutions by centering this service in and around the family home. Fr. McDonnell, in contrast, showed Chávez how to mobilize formal social and political institutions such as the law, hospital administrators, etc., to serve others. Fr. McDonnell’s repertoires for *self-sacrifice in the service of others* differ from Chávez’s mother’s repertoires in that the self becomes an agent for others by acting as a wedge that leverages socio-political power on the behalf of others. This modification of Chávez’s sedimented repertoires represents a hybridization of his primary Discourse, and it would become critical for his work as a community organizer and later as a labor organizer in the 1960s. This example illustrates how the recovery of the body from the morgue emerged as a threshold for Chávez in which he was able to extend his repertoires for *self-sacrifice in the service of others* and *standing up to injustice by citing texts to claim legal agency*. Notably, these repertoires, some of which are rooted in Chávez’s primary Discourse, emerge in the context of supporting and participating in Fr. McDonnell’s missionary work, and are apparently enacted here in ways that position Chávez as part of this Discourse.

The second pivotal figure whom Chávez met in Sal Si Puedes was Fred Ross, the labor organizer and founder of CSO. In his role as a CSO organizer, Chávez helped members of the communities he worked in to complete a range of official forms, including citizenship/immigration papers, visa applications, voter registration efforts, passport applications, accounting books, income tax forms, official affidavits, unemployment and welfare applications, and forms related to deportation proceedings. Overwhelmingly, Chávez’s efforts to help others fill out or complete official forms primarily focused on citizenship and immigration paperwork, which was a key political tactic in the CSO model of community organization. This work became possible following the passage of the



McCarren-Walter Act of 1952, a federal statute that revised US Immigration and Nationalization policies to allow individuals who were 55 years or older and who had been living in the United States for at least twenty years to apply for citizenship (*Organize!*). Chávez explains:

We were confronted with people who wanted to become citizens, but their immigration status was not up to date. Those cases were a lot of work because documentary evidence was needed that they had remained in this country since the time they had arrived. Proof was needed back to 1924 when the law was passed, but I would get evidence back to when they entered the country, whether it was 1924, 1905, or 1890, because it made it easier for the case. Reconstructing a person's whole life was hard because people were old, impatient, and couldn't remember. There were many of those cases, and it took a lot of time. (Levy 110)

Assisting others in completing immigration paperwork required Chávez to navigate a wide range of Mexican and American documents that could serve as evidence from the government's perspective of one's history in the United States. As Chávez wrote in one report from January 13, 1956,

Mrs. Maria Briones called today she wants advice on Immigration and Naturalization. [T]here is no record of her crossing the border. In order to legalize her stay in this country I have to secure documentary evidence to prove her residence since 1924—I wrote letters to the following; Husband's employment records, Children Birth and Baptismal certificates, Children school records of attendance, and to her former Employers.

In the process of assisting others, Chávez must identify texts that can serve as evidence in support of an argument that the individual in question has fulfilled the statutory requirements for citizenship. As this example suggests, doing so required Chávez to identify indirect evidence, such as Mrs. Briones' children's record of school attendance, to establish her residency in the United States. Chávez describes the process of helping others applying for citizenship whose "immigration status was not up to date" in his oral interviews with Levy:

Those cases were a lot of work because documentary evidence was needed that they had remained in this country since the time they had arrived. Proof was needed back to 1924 when the law was passed, but I would get evidence back to when they entered the country, whether it was 1924, 1905, or 1890, because it made it easier for the case. Reconstructing a person's whole life was hard because people were old, impatient, and couldn't remember. There were many of those cases, and they took a lot of time. At first I did this work in the evening, after getting off the job. But soon I didn't have enough time because there was other help people needed. I started taking time off work to do it on my own, a half hour, or one or two hours off. The boss didn't like it, but I got by with it. Then I'd just take off a whole day. I felt I had to do it. (110)

As Chávez's description of the process suggests, assembling the documentary evidence was a time-consuming effort that despite its difficulty was important to his sense of what it meant to be a community organizer. Further, this work entailed enacting the *self-sacrifice in the service of others*, *standing up to injustice*, and *citing texts to claim legal agency* repertoires in the construction or enactment of Chávez's community organizer Discourse.<sup>9</sup>

When taken together, the textual practices that Chávez mobilized to help others meet their goals illustrate how Chávez's lifelong practices of service for others became deeply intertwined with his emergent capacities to use legal and civic texts for the purposes of engaging with socio-political institutions and leveraging dominant power structures on behalf of his community. Furthermore, when the range of reading and writing practices required to complete tasks like generating textual evidence of residency and producing an accurate and persuasive application for citizenship are taken into consideration, we can also see the growth in Chávez's capacity to work with texts that afford socio-political power.

Given that Chávez's awareness of and readiness to read socio-political texts only began to develop in 1952 when he first began working with Fr. McDonnell, the volume of Chávez's use of various textual practices to help others work with and against social institutions demonstrates an emergent sophistication in Chávez's readiness to act, evident in the variety of types of reading Chávez practiced during this time, including examples of organizing labor (Lewis and Debbs biographies), texts focused on spiritual values and practices (St. Augustine, Papal Encyclicals, Gandhi), and texts focused on political issues (Gandhi, Senate hearings). The lifeworld Discourse framework encourages us to view the repertoires and Discourses in a palimpsestic way, as Chávez's primary Discourse and the repertoires that constitute that Discourse get extended and blended with the repertoires and Discourses that Chávez takes up throughout his life. As such, Chávez' civil-rights activist Discourse, which is formally marked by his employment as a CSO organizer, entails repertoires that have roots and histories across the grain of his lifetime and that afford him certain potentials for acting in support of others.

## Conclusion

The elaboration of Chávez's lifeworld Discourse through a Discourse genealogy reveals how dispositions or repertoires of saying-being-doing-feeling that are rooted in primary Discourse get carried along, blended, extended, hybridized, and recontextualized in social scenes throughout a life. Gee's formation of Discourse foregrounds the relationships between socially constructed identities and the saying-being-doing-feeling combinations that allow us to get recognized as and recognize others occupying those secondary Discourses (farmworker, student, priest) within specific social spheres (work, school, temple). The connections between primary and secondary Discourses are characterized in terms of insider/outsider, dominant/marginalized relationships: some primary Discourses (such as those used by upper middle-class White Americans) share many characteristics with dominant secondary Discourses (such as law, business, academy).

Lifeworld Discourse, however, deemphasizes the importance of identities indexed to specific social spheres and underscores instead the importance of our socio-cultural roots as we move through contested social spaces. As Gee explains, lifeworld Discourse refers to our primary Discourse from the vantage point of adulthood, and the analysis of Chávez reveals how the dispositions and repertoires that come from our familial socialization shape our capacities to act as we move through adulthood.

We cultivate capacities to act (agency) by occupying thresholds between social spheres, moving and blending prior repertoires in response to emergent situations in order to create recognizable positions that fuse our prior experience with the socially and materially grounded rhetorical forces that face us. Thus, by the time Chávez completed his fourth year as an organizer for CSO in 1957, his lifeworld Discourse included repertoires from a range of identity kits, including land-owning Mexican-American farmer, Catholic practitioner, migrant farmworker, community organizer, and social/civil-rights activist Discourses. As Chávez occupied thresholds and moved through social spheres of engagement, he enacted a range of repertoires in the process of occupying the socially recognizable positions listed above. While these repertoires may have emerged out of specific social spheres, they represent potentials for Discursive action for Chávez in emergent rhetorical situations. Indeed, Chávez's Discourse history is rather like a tapestry in which elements from one social sphere get woven into the next.

For instance, Chávez's mother's Catholic upbringing of nonviolence and making self-sacrifices in the service of others links with the trainings of Father McDonnell, and this experience in turn provides Chávez with an exposure to a strategy of citing political texts in order to acquire legal agency, which later becomes central to his work as an organizer. This process of blending repertoires from Discourse to Discourse sets aside notions of mastery as Chávez seems to appropriate the Discursive potentials for action most closely aligned with his short- and long-term goals to make self-sacrifices in the service of the greater good. Moreover, while Chávez's efforts to fold in discrete elements from one Discourse to another may result in a stilted Discourse, to use Gee's term, this framing carries with it a negative connotation that emphasizes lack. In contrast, Chávez's experience demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the positive capacities for action that follow the appropriation of new Discursive potentials embedded in repertoires by engaging with multiple conflicting Discourses by dwelling in the borders between the social spheres implicated by those Discourses.

Better understanding how Discourses weave and tie together consonant and dissonant elements over time may allow us to develop pedagogies that afford spaces for the kind of blending evident in Chávez's lifeworld Discourse. For example, we often use metaphors like scaffolding and bridging that assume "education is a journey" through which one leaves behind one discursive world for another. These metaphors imply some sort of peril or danger in the process of literacy learning and development: bridges cross otherwise impassable terrain and scaffolds move the individual above the terrain from which they originate to otherwise unreachable heights. And further, border metaphors imply profound paradigmatic shifts as we move from one jurisdiction to another. However, threshold as a metaphor for literacy learning brings the contrasting discursive worlds closer together as two adjacent rooms connected by a secure between space that can be occupied in ways that allow one to be in both rooms at the same time, to pull resources together from both spaces in order to constitute new capacities to act discursively. Chávez's experience suggests that we find ways to recognize the continuities between disparate Discourses.

Thus, we might adopt and reframe new concepts of composition pedagogy like "thresholds" that allow conceptual space for learners to move between worlds, as suggested by Alvarez's argument for pedagogies grounded *en confianza*. As Alvarez explains, "Thinking of multilingualism as

translingualism celebrates the innovative and creative abilities of individuals to move back and forth among a variety of language resources, including academic English” (9). This analysis supports the creativity required to occupy thresholds between contested spaces and suggests that from a lifeworld Discourse perspective, sedimented repertoires that weave through an individual’s primary Discourse and other secondary Discourses may emerge and be enacted or blended to forge capacities to act in response to rhetorical situations in contested spaces. We must conceptualize the social worlds and language resources students carry with them in ways that permit movement and growth without situating that learning process as a zero-sum game.

A Discourse genealogy attending to lifeworld Discourse represents a way of tracing out how our repertoires and capacities to act in discursive situations emerge from our rich histories of engagement, stemming from our first years, and offer possibilities for constructing identities and activating discursive actions from the thresholds that connect our diverse social spheres. As Guerra puts it in his work on translingualism and rhetorical flexibility, our students today need a rhetorical sensibility that allows them to see how various language orientations enable specific language practices (232), and I agree with Gilyard’s assessment that we risk losing sight of competencies when we conceptualize languages as relative abstractions. Instead of conceptualizing competency as the mastery of a pre-existing Discourse or language, we should think of competency in terms of performance.

For Chávez, much of his discursive competency lay in his capacity to enact prior repertoires and extend them through processes of decontextualization and blending. We can’t outline a literacy history in terms of primary or secondary Discourses as if they are distinct, yet perhaps we can articulate competencies without resorting to monolingual ideologies by attending to how individuals recruit sedimented repertoires to cultivate a readiness to act in contested social spheres that for some students may seem uninhabitable by dwelling on the borders of Discourses. Especially when we consider how seemingly stable Discourses are often racialized (Baker-Bell; Rosa and Flores), occupying thresholds may enable the kinds of movement and blending to achieve purposes and goals in those contested spaces, for it enables students to draw on, blend, and recontextualize their repertoires. Ultimately, as the Discourse genealogy of Chávez suggests, these elements collide into each other and coalesce into new formations that emerge as rhetorical situations arise in our daily life.

Threshold spaces are zones in which students have access (or at least have the sense or awareness that they have access) to mobilize already sedimented repertoires in conjunction with new practices across Discourse spaces. We can think about this as a sort of zone of proximal development in which repertoires from other social spheres can be made available to compose meaning. Lev Vygotsky describes zones of proximal development as the spaces in which learning is marked more by a potential for growth than the demonstration of prior achievement (87). Likewise, and following the critical literacy scholars cited above, threshold spaces are marked by their potential for creative (Alvarez), flexible (Guerra), politically charged (Baker-Bell; Rosa and Flores) and other movements between Discourses rather than the performance of previously sedimented repertoires.

Using a Discourse genealogical approach to map out repertoires throughout students’ lives and

tracing the connections between their varied social experiences can be a way to cultivate an awareness of where the thresholds lie for students and how they can engage with those thresholds in order to motivate repertoires in new spaces and contexts. Identifying and analyzing the repertoires rooted in students' primary Discourses would be an important part of such a pedagogical approach. For some students, academic Discourse may already be such an entrenched and naturalized phenomena that gaining sufficient awareness of the discourse space as a threshold space may be more complicated than in engaging with other kinds of practices.<sup>10</sup> Thus, genres that are not specific to academic contexts might be better opportunities to identify, blend, or extend prior repertoires. Instructors might want to work to help students identify how prior repertoires might be consonant with the rhetorical situations posed by class activities. Reflective writing would be an important tactic to help students develop the kinds of awareness implied by Discourse genealogy and to further consider the competencies in their writing acts, including which repertoires to adapt or blend in order to occupy a threshold between social spheres of influence.<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gee uses the term discourse/Discourse in two ways: discourse refers to stretches of coherent language like conversations, essays, emails, etc., and Discourse refers to the combinations of saying-being-doing-feeling that are tied to social identities.

<sup>2</sup> Gee's theory of Discourse has been influential in literacy and composition studies, but that record is marked primarily by the influence of the concepts of primary/secondary Discourses. Barton uses the concept of "lifeworld discourse" to describe a similar notion of one's non-specialized discourse practice in an analysis of ethical discourse practices in end-of-life conversations between physicians and patient families, but she draws that term from Mishler's analysis of medical discourse. Mishler's project has been influential in the medical field and may have been an influence on Gee, but it is not credited in Gee's explanation of lifeworld Discourse.

<sup>3</sup> See my explanation of how the practice of literacy practices cultivates a readiness to act in discursive situations in "Composing Agency."

<sup>4</sup> While Chávez's experiences, political success as a labor organizer, and public notoriety certainly constitute an exceptional life, I see the processes of Discourse practice catalogued here as critical examples of typical language development. Notably, the period I examine does not include Chávez's more storied career of organizing farmworkers that began in the mid-1960s. So while Chávez was "an extraordinarily skilled communicator" (Hammerback and Jensen 3), this analysis looks at the developmental period that led to Chávez's later successes

<sup>5</sup> Hammerback and Jensen's project focuses primarily on explaining how Chávez used rhetorical discourse to persuade others to take action. They ground their analysis on representative speeches, writings, and other materials produced between the early 1960s through Chávez's death in 1993. Hammerback and Jensen's work is important because it represents the first sustained analysis of Chávez's discourse practices. However, their work only briefly addresses Chávez's childhood and early adult work in the 1950s with the CSO. My study thus contributes a more detailed analysis of Chávez's discourse practices during this formative period with attention paid to how Chávez's discourse practices connect with, extend, and are combined with a number of other discourses in his early adulthood.

<sup>6</sup> Chávez's daily activity reports forms the majority of the Fred R. Ross, Sr. Papers (1.5 linear feet). The existing archives include entries for almost every day between 1954 and 1956. The record is much thinner beginning in 1957, with significant gaps between sets of daily reports.

<sup>7</sup> Mishler's formation of lifeworld discourse, (which like Gee, draws on Habermas' work) posits a similar distinction between specialized and non-specialized language. For Mishler's project, he is interested in making a distinction between medical discourse and lifeworld discourse, or "the ordinary 'common sense' world of social reality . . . The self is the center of space and time coordinates in the sense that events are located and given significance with reference to one's own biographical situation and location in the world" (122). In contrast, for specialized discourses, such as medicine, the meaning of semiotic activities is grounded in an abstracted, theoretical, non-subjective disinterestedness (122).

<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Cooper also argues for an ecological translingual view, arguing that such an approach may allow us to better account for linguistic responsibility.

<sup>9</sup> As one reviewer helpfully pointed out, Chávez is working here to construct genealogies not unlike the Discourse genealogy project taken up in this paper. It is possible that this discourse

practice helped further strengthen Chávez's broader understanding and awareness of how discourse functions in social and rhetorical situations. As noted above, Hammerbak and Jensen discuss the presence and awareness of social discourse as an important part of Chávez's rhetorical career as a labor organizer in the mid-1960s through the end of his life. The experiences discussed in this analysis are undoubtedly the formative moments, as Chávez has noted that he didn't really start learning to read and write English texts until he started working with Fr. McDonnell and Ross.

<sup>10</sup> One of the challenges of adapting a Discourse Genealogy or tracing out lifeworld Discourse in first-year-writing courses will be that—at least for traditionally aged college students—they are often in the middle of emerging as independent adults. Of course, many students do not fall in this category and enter college on a more independent footing than other students. Still, it's an aspect to consider, since the analysis developed here has the privilege of looking at a life lived. Nonetheless, much of the analysis considers Chávez during his twenties, a period commensurate with many of our college students.

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