Book Review

JACKSON, BERNARD S. *Making Sense in Law: Linguistic, Psychological and Semiotic Perspectives.* Liverpool, UK: Deborah Charles Publications, 1995. Pp. xii+516 (HB 1995 PB 1996).

Ostensibly designed to educate lawyers and magistrates in the fine points of language analysis, psychological concepts, and semiotics, this contribution to narrative psychology incorporates conceptions drawn from developmental, cognitive, and social psychology, as well as other human science disciplines. The author, Queen Victoria Professor of Law at the University of Liverpool, gives in-depth tutorials on cutting edge issues in linguistics, psychology, and semiotics. A sampling of the issues gives a flavor of the content: negotiable speech acts, the display of power in language, theories of cognitive competence, the narrative turn in social psychology, morality and convention, behavioral style and social influence, witnessing, and personality and emotion. In nearly every discussion, the author brings to bear—often with apt quotations—the formulations of authoritative scholars.

In the space of a brief review, I can only touch upon a few of the ideas that would be of special interest to psychologists. Providing a central theme is the theoretical framework of Algirdas J. Greimas, known as the leader of the Paris School that refined the structural linguistics of deSaussure. The aim of the Greimassian school is to identify basic structures of signification, to be achieved

through sense-making based on the concept of narrative.

The Greimas model as represented here should give added impetus to the now well-developed psychological programs of research in discourse analysis. Two levels of analysis are proposed: the syntagmatic, in which sense-making is dependent upon underlying patterns of action in the form of story sequences, and the paradigmatic, in which choices of story elements are created and employed in story sequences. To achieve analysis of any text, three levels of signification are advanced: (1) the manifest level (roughly corresponding to perception); (2) the thematic level (the stock of narratives acquired in the course of socialization and used to make sense of perceptions; and (3) the basic structures of signification that are claimed to be universal. Unlike Chomsky's conception, the followers of Greimas lean toward the formulation that such deep structures are derived from experience in a discursive world.

As I remarked above, the book is a treasure trove of tutorials of potential value to any one interested in sense-making, whether in law, in psychology, or any of the social and humanistic studies. For example, the book contains a lucidly critical digest of Piaget's contributions to sense-making as well as recent developments in the study of moral judgment and conduct. The Kohlberg and Gilligan views are presented in a balanced way and are subjected to analysis using the tools of the semiotician.

Of special interest is the chapter "Theories of Cognitive Competence." The author presents a masterful rendition of Chomsky's generative linguistics that serves as a backdrop for theories advanced by other semioticians. There is much grist for the mill and the reader is supplied with a wealth of information to ponder the question: Is language a mental property of the individual or a social product located

in the social group? The chapter includes a discussion of Bruner's contributions in which narrative competence is taken to be prior to linguistic competence. Narrative structuring is seen as an inborn competence that makes possible the organization of inputs from the world of occurrences. Particular narrative plots are locally acquired in the course of enculturation. The nature of the inborn competence is still to be spelled out, a task already begun by evolutionary psychologists.

A brief but incisive section records "the narrative turn in social psychology." In the last decade, psychologists have published a score of books that account for human action with constructions that lean heavily on the narrative as a root metaphor. Breaking out of the boundaries imposed by traditional positivist thinking, these scholars have joined the ranks of scholars in the humanities and have promulgated theories of action and theories of biography that follow from the

premise that we live in a story-shaped world.

One of many applications to legal problems is the interpretation of emotion in stories of trials. The author offers an up-to-date discourse on emotion and considers the problems of translating a particular story of emotional life into discourse patterns that are acceptable in the courtroom. In "crimes of passion," for example, the defendant commits an act of violence in a moment of rage following a provocation by the victim. "What actually happened"—events that necessarily included embodied features—must be translated into "the story in the trial," a story the telling of which must conform to the rules and customs of court procedures. Thus the construction of the emotional life episode in the courtroom is necessarily a cognitive reconstruction. The judge and jury are confronted with the problem of making sense of the defendant's deformed story—the demand for cognitive purity allows a verbal account that portrays only a part of the story.

Has the author succeeded in the goal implied in the title *Making Sense in Law?* The many relevant applications of semiotics and psychology to the multifaceted problems of lawyers and judges would call for an affirmative answer. This book, however, is not exclusively for practicing lawyers and legal scholars. To be sure, it would be an important addition to the working library of scholars practicing at the interface of psychology and the law. But it would also be useful to scholars practicing discourse analysis, and to scholars who may be curious about the central role of semiotics in forming and reforming the narrative constructions that guide our understandings and our actions. (*Theodore R. Sarbin, University of*

California, Santa Cruz)