

GUY COOK

Discourse and Literature: The Interplay of Form and Mind
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This is a highly condensed and difficult book to review, involving as it does a new theory of literariness derived from a critical examination of twentieth century theories of discourse, psychology and literary theory, including schema theory, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and literary theories focusing on text and reader. Its author, Guy Cook, is a Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics for TESOL at the University of London Institute of Education.

His method or strategy is organic-cum-synthetic, gathering a component for his argument here, discarding the superfluous, the insufficient, the irrelevant there, and adding new elements to existing theory that complete or change a perspective. In general terms, his is a major attempt at building bridges and arranging first or renewed encounters between three partners: linguistics, schema theory and literary theory. In a scholarly way he makes each of these disciplines feel guilty for their ignorance or disdain of each other and then invites them to see the light and forge new relationships. In the process, the reader is furnished with an enormous amount of theory that is carefully, and as far as this one can see, fairly sifted. If nothing else were achieved, the book performs the function of a critical survey about the origins and history of text processing in this century.

But its aim is certainly not simply to inform, as already indicated. In his opening words, the author tells us that this book is about the relationship between literary language and our mental representations of the world. Its starting point is schema theory: a body of ideas which has passed from psychology through AI and into discourse analysis. He quickly presents us with his daring claim that in the field of discourse analysis literary texts are unique in kind because they represent a type of text which may perform the important function of breaking down existing schemata, reorganizing them, and building new ones. In other words, literary texts may have the ability to refresh and change the ways in which people think and feel about the world. Cook demonstrates his claim in an intricate and close-knit argument whose content is almost impossible to reduce to a summary without losing a vital link. Consequently, what follows will be a description of the motivating force behind his argument: a consideration of what he calls the 'social approach', which has prevailed in discourse analysis in recent years and in which literature is just one more genre among equals, functioning in much the same way as others. Then comes a simple outline of the book's structure, including references to some of the highlights of his argument.

In the introduction Cook explains why a substantial proportion of the growing interest of applied linguistics in discourse analysis during the past two decades has centred on literary discourse. Discourse analysis must be able to account for *all* types of discourse; and literature is widely if not universally considered one of the most important and the most powerful. Moreover, the discourse analyst's interest in literature is motivated not only by its potential to augment our understanding of discourse in general, but also by its relevance to pedagogy. The study of literary discourse forms a good part of the curriculum in

both first and second language education and our conceptions of literature are bound to influence the way we teach it. Thus, says the author, continued exploration of the nature of literature is crucial in the applied as well as the theoretical sphere.

In claiming uniqueness for literary discourse, however, Cook is cutting across the consensus that has emerged in recent years –the ‘social approach’ as he calls it, referred to above– a consensus which is due to the convergence of tendencies in both literary and linguistic theories. Discourse analysis has concentrated on the social nature of communication, stressing contextual aspects of meaning which are interactive and negotiated, determined by social relations and identities of the participants in communication. Particularly influential in the formation of the consensus have been the Hallidayan conception of language as a social semiotics, and the belief that the function of all discourse is a blend of the interpersonal and ideational ones.

This consensus considers that literature, too, is primarily a mode of social interaction, reflecting and creating its own institutions and power relations. In this view there is nothing distinctive about either the language of literary discourse or its representations of the world; it is rather that some texts become literary when presented as such by institutions or when read in certain ways by readers, and that is all. Which texts these are will thus always be relative to a specific social milieu.

This social approach has developed, says the author, in understandable reaction against other views of literature, each of which has emphasized some element of the literary experience at the expense of others, or taken an element which is present in some literary works and elevated it into a defining characteristic of all literature, often with damaging effects in the classroom. He finds the starting point for his argument in a critical appraisal of the social approach’s rejection of the following three main ideas about literature: Firstly, the idea that through literature a particularly perceptive or accurate view of the world is somehow transmitted to the reader with an overall improving effect, either moral or intellectual; secondly, the notion that literariness resides in a particular use of language; and, thirdly, the idea of literature as a canon of texts interpreted in ways which clearly reflect the values and the identity of a particular nation or social class. While pointing out some of the powerful reasons for accepting the rejection of these ideas of literature, Cook says that there are elements which the coldly convincing rigour of the social approach leaves out. It is not that the social approach, with its emphasis on the relativity of literature, is wrong, but that it is incomplete. With its new dogmatism concerning the social relativity of literature it may distract us from the fact that people often *do* seem to find something acceptable, beautiful, understandable, enjoyable and uplifting in literary traditions of societies and social groups other than their own and that they can recognize in those traditions a common experience which cuts across the boundaries of nation, culture, and history.

The most important criticism that Cook has to make of the social approach, however, is its incapacity to explain the paradox presented, in widely different social contexts, by the contradiction between the apparent uselessness of literary works and the high value placed upon them. Though they may incidentally offer us information, or create social relations and institutions, this does not seem to be the prime motivation for either the writing or the reading of literature. On the contrary, literary texts often deal with worlds and people who do not exist, with emotions and experiences which do not affect us, with banal facts which we already know such as the sadness of death, the beauty of nature, etc., and they create patterns and play with expectations for no apparent reason. In the face of

all this, says Cook, a theory is needed to explain the extraordinary value and pleasure accorded to such features by very different readers.

In relation to his basic thesis that there is a type of discourse capable of changing our mental perceptions of the world, Cook says that while the texts which perform this function will be different for particular individuals or social groups, the effect itself may be universal and may answer a universal need. What is more, he believes that texts conventionally classified as literary often fulfil this function. His next important statement is that his thesis demands not simply a description of literary forms or of the reader in isolation, but of the two together. All this, then, is the prelude to the elaboration and demonstration of his theory. As his argument requires description of both readers' minds and literary forms, it ranges across a number of theories of literature, psychology and discourse from different periods of the twentieth century in order to find suitable components for it.

The diversity of these areas can be seen in the following outline of the book's contents: Part One considers a number of approaches to discourse in general and to literature in particular, assessing their strengths and weaknesses in the description of literary effect. Chapter I, entitled "A basis for analysis: Schema theory, its general principles, history and terminology" and which provides the foundation for a description of mental representations and the effect of literature upon them, considers schema theory. We are reminded that it has its origins in the Gestalt psychology of the 1920's and 1930's and that its basic claim is that a new experience is understood by comparison with a stereotypical version of a similar experience held in memory. The new experience is then processed in terms of deviation from, or conformity to, the stereotypical version. The theory applies to both the processing of sensory data and to the processing of language. After a long eclipse, schema theory received an enormous amount of attention in the AI work of the 1970's and 1980's, where it was developed for the help it provides in the two crucial AI problems of visual recognition and the understanding of texts, only the latter being relevant to Cook's theory.

AI work on text understanding, inspired by schema theory, was in turn seized upon by discourse analysis and reading theory, and has continued to exert a strong influence in these areas ever since (see for example Carrell and Eisterhold 1983*, Carrell 1988, Widdowson 1983 and 1984, McCarthy 1991, Wallace 1992, Hatch 1992). The reason for this enthusiasm is the powerful insight which schema theory provides into the problem of 'coherence' or how texts take on unity and meaning for their receivers. In discourse analysis the theory has been joined with existing approaches to coherence, such as the study of cohesion, text structure, and pragmatics (areas which have in turn attracted the reciprocal interest of AI). As such, schema theory forms an indispensable part of an emerging overall theory of discourse.

Chapter 2, "A first bearing: Discourse analysis and its limitations", considers contemporary approaches to discourse analysis, highlighting not only the contribution they may make to a description of literature, but also their incapacity to account for many of its features. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the kind of discourse analysis which derives from and shares some of the 'scientific' premises of linguistics (the author's punctuation), and, as throughout the book, Cook's focus is on written text experienced through reading.

Acceptability above the sentence, or the attempt to extend grammar upwards (Harris 1952); aspects of so-called literary cohesion including parallelism, verb form sequences, and referring expressions; the omission fallacy; meaning as

* For the bibliographical references, see the original work.

encoding/decoding (versus the favoured approach of meaning as construction); and pragmatic attempts to characterize 'literariness', are all found wanting in their application to literary texts. A special note is added here, however, about the importance of parallelism to the development of the author's approach. Firstly, it is largely ignored by AI schema theories of how text is represented in the mind, and secondly, it is central to the Jakobsonian and stylistic attempts to associate literariness with formal linguistic features.

In an important section of this chapter the tendency of pragmatics to concern itself with the sender, rather than with the effect on the receiver, and the failure of the classifications of the functions of language presented in the main theories of Bühler (1934) Jakobson (1960), Searle (1969, 1975b), Popper (1972), and Hymes (1972) to give room to and explain Jakobson's 'poetic function', are held up for criticism. To the two functions to which the taxonomies of all these theories can be reduced, namely, 1. the communication of information about the world, and 2. the creation and maintenance (or destruction) of social relations, Cook suggests the necessity of adding a third: the function of cognitive change. A little further on he shows the co-operative and politeness principles of pragmatics, and the speech-act theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1975b) to be irrelevant in relation to literary texts.

Finally, before closing this chapter, Cook refers to a very different kind of discourse analysis -the 'post-scientific' approach, associated with approaches to language which derive from philosophy joining forces with literary, psychological and psychoanalytic theory, and embracing political critiques of discourse such as feminism. Such approaches, in particular the influential discussions by Foucault, tend to work top-down, beginning with intuitively perceived categories of discourse, for example, 'scientific discourse', and working downwards towards the details of language. Linguistic-based approaches, on the other hand, tend to work bottom-up from the details of language and text organization towards broader categories. Three philosophical movements which have influenced such contemporary post-semiotic views of text-processing, but which are not compatible with the scientific pretensions of linguistics and therefore largely ignored by it, are deconstruction, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. Each of these movements, essentially associated with Derrida, Heidegger and Husserl, respectively, dissociate themselves in different ways from the types of conclusions sought after by science. Paradoxically, however, points out the author, many of the views held by the adherents of the latter two movements *are* compatible with some of the 'scientific' tenets of schema theory. He adds that in literary studies, the deeper incompatibility of the 'scientific' approaches to language with 'post-scientific' ones is illustrated by their failure even to debate, despite attempts to bring them together (Fabb, Attridge, Durante, and MacCabe 1987). The evidence for this lack of contact, he says, is an absence, rather than a presence: books on either side of the divide, though mutually concerned with human interaction with texts, often simply fail to acknowledge the existence of alternative views.

Chapter 3, "A second bearing: AI text theory and its limitations", returns in more detail to the issue of how representations of the world are derived from, and brought to bear upon, the interpretation of texts. As in the next two chapters also, the aim is to bring together, as additional resources for a discourse analysis, two apparently incompatible bedfellows: AI schema theory and certain schools of literary theory. At first sight they may seem to be very different disciplines. The first, concerned with the replication of human skills by computers, draws heavily upon the applied natural sciences and mathematics, as well as on the human sciences of psychology and linguistics. Literary theory, on the other hand, has often drawn its material from the arts, though it, too, has been inspired by

psychology and linguistics. These differences, says Cook, may well be reinforced by mutual ignorance, different education backgrounds, and preconceptions of reciprocal irrelevance among those involved. Yet, they have a major concern in common: to understand the processing and production of texts. Some of the shortcomings of AI theory examined in this chapter include the possible bafflement of AI by the complexity of human intercourse, the failure to distinguish the motivation of the 'level of detail' in discourse, the omission of connections between one action and another and the failure to account for linguistic choices.

In Chapter 4, "Testing the AI approach: Two analyses: a 'literary' and a 'non-literary' text", the modes of analysis outlined in the previous chapter are brought to bear on two problematic texts: a translation (the opening section of *Crime and Punishment*), whose literariness seems to survive the complete change of form implicit in translation from one language to another, and an advertisement, which, while it makes use of literary techniques, is unlikely by most to be considered literary.

Chapter 5, "A third bearing: Literary theories from formalism to stylistics", surveys and assesses some twentieth century literary theories which claim to provide both a description of literary language and form, and of their effect upon the reader. It traces a tradition from Russian formalism, through structuralism and stylistics, to reader response and reception theory.

The introduction to this chapter consists of a useful summary of the argument up to this stage, which has critically examined discourse analysis and schema theory as tools for the analysis of literary text. Schema theory can contribute to discourse analysis by showing how, where coherence is not signalled by cohesion, induced from conformity to text structure, or pragmatically inferred, it can nevertheless be constructed through schemata. The types of schema described in Chapter 4, such as 'script', 'plan', 'goal' and 'sub-goal', and 'theme', are hierarchical, and coherence can be established by referring to as high a level as necessary. Failure to account for coherence at one level can be overcome by reference to the level above. Failure at the highest level will often lead to the attribution of either incoherence or madness.

So far, however, the author's approach has presented only a partial framework. It has been more concerned with conformity to expectations than deviations from them. A further shortcoming is that it has viewed the construction of coherence as the interaction of a single isolated text with knowledge of the world; it has taken little account of knowledge of other texts, and of the complex effects which intertextual resonances may have on the overall effect. It has also neglected discourse as a mode of action affecting -or attempting to affect- the lives of others, and the consequent effects of different narrative stances. Related to both these omissions is the crucial role of choices between linguistic and text structures: the many ways in which the same conceptual content can have different functional or temporal arrangements, etc.

The specific aim of this chapter is to elaborate the approach in ways which enable it to cope more fully with literary discourse, and to develop its potential as a description of readers' experience of deviation.

The author begins by defining what 'modern literary theory' is. Despite the rather arbitrary and *post factum* nature of the field (from which AI is excluded, unlike other non-literary theories by Marx, Freud, Saussure, and Derrida, for instance, which are included in the anthologies, university courses, etc.), and notwithstanding the diversity and incompatibility of approaches which the term subsumes, modern literary theory may broadly be categorized as writing about literature which does not merely accept and comment upon a literary canon, but

rather seeks to understand the rationale behind the canon. Its aim is to understand, not particular literary texts *per se*, but the nature and function of literature in general. In so doing, however, it may, and often does, employ analyses of individual texts and provide considerable insights into them.

Then comes a longish list of the shortcomings of the usual classification of modern literary theory into the following 'movements': formalism, structuralism, linguistics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, reader-response, and post structuralism. It is too rigid; very different tendencies are lumped together; theorists like Barthes, whose thoughts have developed through temporary attachment to one philosophy or another, have their work fragmented and misrepresented; the perception of linguistics is limited to Saussurean semiotics, Jakobsonian functionalism, and an occasional reference to Chomsky; there is little awareness of developments of text theory in discourse analysis or of the computational paradigm - including the AI one; the absence of theories of the cognitive role in literary theories; and short shrift is given by anthropologists to certain elements of communication. For example, there is little attention to the author except for a negative critique of literary biography and scholarship. And in drama and recitation the intermediate role of performer is almost entirely ignored, as is stressed by the fairly general reference to 'reader' instead of 'audience'. The author announces that his first concern is to trace theories which characterize literariness as a deviant or patterned use of language - or as, in other words, a particular type of text. He shall then progress to some of the literary theories which regard literariness as a relationship between texts and readers, and are thus more readily compatible with schema theory.

The Russian formalist theory of defamiliarization is given a privileged place in this chapter. With this radical new view of 'form conceived as content itself' (Shklovsky, quoted by Eikenbaum (1926) 1978:29), the centre of critical attention shifted away from the relationship of the literary text with the world or with its creator towards internal formal relationships, either within one literary work, or between literary works. Despite the weaknesses of formalism (its confusion, omissions and inconsistencies - the most obvious example being its failure to identify the norm by which deviation is defined), and its abrupt end, it had introduced a number of important theoretical concepts which are often overlooked in a schema approach to text. The formalists had described a type of discourse (which, perhaps, they had wrongly identified with literature), whose salient characteristic is deviance from expectation, but whose deviance is neither solely linguistic, nor a function of the relationship of a text to the events of the world. To explain this phenomenon, they had introduced the important concepts of intertextuality, internal discourse structure, discourse type, and narrative attitude, all of which have become major concerns of discourse analysis and should have been major concerns in AI, says Cook. What they did not do was try to describe the norm against which deviation is defined, or say why it is that readers find such deviation so attractive and important, often according literary texts a higher status than others produced in society. The author's claim is that an answer to these questions may be provided by bringing together the insights of schema theory with the fundamental concept of formalism's defamiliarization.

The rest of the chapter is devoted to showing how in western Europe, after (and sometimes unaware of Russian formalism) the 'scientific' approach to literary discourse split off into two directions - both profoundly influenced by the Saussurean description of language (Saussure (1916, 1960), but making radically different use of this description. The French structuralists, with their almost metaphorical interpretation, largely ignored the sub-sentential linguistic system and searched instead for grammars and structures at the highest levels of narrative

and text organization, presaging the interest in story grammars in AI and discourse analysis (see van Dijk and Kintsch 1983: 55-9). Jakobson, on the other hand, and later Anglo-American stylistics, turned back to the linguistic code, searching for 'literariness' at the sub-sentential level. These two approaches may both throw light on, and benefit from, schema theory as an aid to literary analysis, claims Cook.

Chapter 6, "Incorporating the reader: Two analyses combining stylistics and schema theory", continues the history begun in Chapter 5. In an analysis of two problematic texts, 'Elizabeth Taylor's Passion' (an advertisement) and the poem by Edward Bond, 'First World War Poets', a synthesis is attempted between an analysis of form and of the mental representations of a reader (the author), endeavouring to show how literary effect cannot be confined to one or the other, but demands a description of both.

Part Two brings together ideas and techniques of analysis from all the approaches discussed in Part One. Chapter 7, "A theory of discourse deviation: Schema refreshment and cognitive change", examines some psychological theories of a dynamic interaction between experience and mental representation, and proposes a theory of how mental representations interact with, and are altered by, literary discourse.

Here the author reminds us that in all that has been said so far, both in the analysis of approaches to discourse and in the summary of literary theory, three major levels have been acknowledged in discourse (whether literary or non-literary). These, in the broadest terms, are the levels of language, text structure, and world knowledge. In the very useful Table 7: 1 (p. 197), he shows the correlation of these three levels in schema theory, discourse analysis, and literary theory. In level one, (world) schemata correspond to knowledge in discourse theory, and to the reader in literary theory. Level two consists of text schemata, functional structure (defined pragmatically), and structure (defined intertextually). In the third level, we find correlation between language schemata, grammar, and linguistic form. Placed rather curiously in both the second and third levels of the discourse analysis column are formal links (cohesion) due to the fact that cohesion is both sub- and suprasentential.

Cook says that there is an understandable, but regrettable tendency in various approaches to focus on one of these levels to the detriment of the others. This is most evident in literary theories where the legacy of formalism has fragmented into an exclusive emphasis on language (Jakobson), on text structure (structuralism), and on the reader (in those reader-response theories which deny an autonomous text). Literary theorists of these schools have tried vainly to identify literariness in terms of deviation and conformity at one, and only one, of these levels. In discourse analysis, this is less evident, because the inability of purely formal and textual approaches to coherence has been recognized. Discourse analysis could in fact be defined as the attempt to bring together knowledge, text structure and language. However, it is also true that in discourse analysis the schematic organization of knowledge has often been regarded as fixed. Schemata are brought to bear upon the interpretation of discourse rather than be affected by it. For this reason, pragmatic and text-structural approaches to discourse, though they work well for discourse primarily motivated by the politeness and cooperative principles, are weak in dealing with literary discourse. AI theory, on the other hand, falls into the opposite trap from structuralism and Jakobsonian stylistics. While it pays attention to knowledge, it has a tendency to ignore the complexities created by differences in linguistic and text-structural form.

If it is the primary function of a particular category of discourse to effect the function of refreshment of schemata, it seems likely, says Cook, that the refreshment will take place, not at one of the three levels, but in the relation between them. Where there is deviation at one or both of the linguistic and text-structural levels, and this deviation interacts with a reader's existing schemata to cause schema refreshment, there exists the phenomenon which he calls 'discourse deviation'. Various examples of possible 'discourse deviations', from the simple to the very complex, are suggested by the author.

Chapter 8, "Application of the theory: Discourse deviation in three literary texts", demonstrates this theory in the detailed analyses of three literary texts chosen for their popularity both in literary pedagogy and scholarly analysis, where quite different interpretations have been produced. They are William Blake's 'The Tyger', Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and Gerald Manley Hopkins' 'The Windhover'.

The implications of this approach for pedagogy, which have been put aside in the development of the argument, are considered again in Chapter 9. Approaches to literature teaching are inevitably influenced by current approaches to both education and language. Often they are *over*-influenced, says the author, and literature is seen as just another use of language, and literature study, just another subject on the curriculum, which has led to the neglect of features which mark literature as discourse and an area of study demanding different techniques of description and different pedagogical procedures. The influence has been one-way: *from* theories of language use and education *to* theories of literature and literature teaching. Where literature has been introduced into the foreign language classroom as a means of furthering language development, it has also been influenced by theories of language acquisition stressing the importance of attention to meaning rather than form. Among the interesting suggestions that Cook has to offer about the teaching of literature is that a teacher-centred approach is not necessarily the authoritarian and/or boring affair that we have been hearing about for some time. On the contrary, it is often in the outwardly passive role of listening to the extended discourse of another person, that moments of intellectual liberation and progress are achieved. Moreover, the silent and *outwardly* passive reader, like the student listening in class, may *inwardly* be experiencing a mental revolution. This, he adds, is very often the case in the reading of literature. Conversely, to be always asking the student for his reactions to a text, and asking him or her to share them with other students, may stifle the whole mental process which literature can stimulate.

Obviously Cook's theory needs to be tested further, but it would appear to be a viable one. And its implications for the teaching of literature, a welcome relief for many a teacher who, in the attempt to produce a form of group dynamics or to get some sort of reaction from students to a text, has often been faced with a blank stare. After all, as Cook warns, certain works on the syllabus (however 'great') may simply not affect a reader, and this should be respected. In accordance with his theory, the literary experience is one of mental disruption, refreshment and play, more typically effected when the individual withdraws from the world of social and practical necessity than when he or she plunges into it.

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