Schematic Coherence in Poetry[*]

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Abstract

Schemata are the underlying connections that allow new experience and information to be aligned with previous knowledge. When one reads a text he usually uses all his levels of schemata. Schemata enable us to make sense of what is perceived and experienced in the world.

In poetry, readers usually examine carefully and deeply what they are reading in comparison with other sorts of discourse. Coherence is achieved when a reader perceives connections among schemata. It is a connection between linguistic and textual features of the text, and reader's mental expectations as well as stored knowledge of the world. This paper discusses the role of schematic correlation in poetry, and the effect of different schematic background and difference among readers on schema change and interpretation of meaning.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this study is to show that discourse approach to literature requires to be complemented by means of schema theory; it is the reader's role and shared knowledge that is activated through reading.

The notion of schemata will be used as a mental representation of pre existing knowledge gained through experience and used in reading and in

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interpreting literary texts. The idea is that the mind stimulated either by key linguistic items in a text or by context, activates schema and uses it to make sense of the discourse.

The major characteristic of literature is based on schema disruption, namely the change of reader's existing schema. It is the function of 'cognitive change'. The challenge of reader's existing schemata at higher processing levels is usually accompanied by deviation at the linguistic-structural level, which shows the need to incorporate formal linguistic analysis in this type of approach. This phenomenon of relating text deviation to reader's schemata is called by Cook as 'discourse deviation'.

This study focuses on the role of schema theory in achieving coherence in poetry. The main idea is that schematic knowledge is an essential component of successful interpretation of meaning as linguistic knowledge.

2. The Concept of Schemata

A schema (plural schemata) is a hypothetical mental structure for representing generic concepts stored in memory. It is a sort of framework, or plan, or script. Schemata are created through experience with people, objects and events in the world. When we encounter something repeatedly, such as a restaurant, we begin to generalize across our restaurant experiences to develop an abstract, generic set of expectations about what we will encounter in a restaurant (Van Dijk, 1985: 78; Cook, 1989: 73).

Bartlett (1932: 197) believes that our memory of discourse is not based on straight representation, but it is constructive. This constructive process uses information from the encountered discourse, together with knowledge from past experience related to the discourse at hand to build a mental representation. The past experience, Bartlett argues, cannot be an

accumulation of successive individuated events and experience; it must be organized and made manageable. The past operates as an organized mass rather than as a group of elements each of which retains its specific character. What gives structure to the organized mass is the schema, which Bartlett did not propose as a form of arrangement, but as something which remains active and developing. It is the active feature of discourse that leads to the constructive processes in memory (ibid. 249).

3. Views on Schemata

A strong view of schemata sees them as something influencing the reader's opinion even before the text is read. Schemata are higher-level complex (and even conventional or habitual) knowledge structures (Van Dijk, 1981: 141) which function as "ideational scaffolding" (Anderson, 1977: 372) in the organization and interpretation of experience. It can be seen as the organized background knowledge which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse. Schemata, whether fixed or flexible, are a way to account for the interpretation and production of discourse (Brown and Yule, 1983: 250).

Tannen (1979) ;(as cited in Brown and Yule 1983: 24) uses the description "structure of expectation" adopted from Ross (1975) to characterize the effect of schemata on our thinking. In addition there is evidence in Tannen's study of (1980) that such expectations affect what type of discourse is produced. Accordingly, there are different aspects that can affect the type of schemata produced. Different cultural backgrounds can result in different schemata for the description of witnessed events (Anderson, 1977). People's personal histories and interests (and sex probably) contribute to the creation of higher-level schemata which cause them to see the text or the event in certain ways.

From the above definitions, it can be concluded that schema is the prior knowledge gained through experiences stored in one's mind. It is an essential component in the process of reading and comprehension.

4. Activation of Schemata

Because texts are never completely explicit, the reader must rely on pre existing schemata to provide plausible interpretations. Readers make use of their schema when they can relate what they already know about a topic to the facts and ideas appearing in a text. Schema theorists have acknowledged that comprehension occurs when a reader is able to use prior knowledge and experience to interpret an author's message (Bransford, 1979; Novak and Crown, 1984).

In this respect, Cook (1994: 69) states that "the mind stimulated by key words or phrases in the text or by the context activates a knowledge schema". Cook implies that it is not necessarily a matter of conscious processes, but rather with automatic cognitive responses given to external stimuli. This view clarifies that schemata are activated in one of two ways:

1- New information from the outside world can be cognitively received and related to already known information stored in memory through retrieval or remembering. In this case, new concepts are assimilated into existing schemata which can be altered or expanded.

2- New information can be represented by new mental structures. In this case, in absence of already existing schemata, new knowledge builds up new schemata.

5. Discourse Approach to Literature

The general proposal of schema theory concerning discourse processing is well-known: a schema is a mental representation of a typical

instance, and various types of schema have been proposed. The relationship of schema to discourse would be as follows: enough detail is given in discourse to trigger the selection of schema in the receiver's mind. This schema is then used in top-down processing. Other than that details are given only where there is a divergence from the schema. Unmentioned details - default elements - can if necessary be retrieved from the share of knowledge, from the share of schema (Cook, 1995: 146).

Cook (1994:83) shows that the basic claim of schema theory is that human understanding, and text understanding, can be represented as hierarchy of levels of schemata in which failure to understand one level can be corrected by referring to the level above. This relationship shows that plans or scripts at the highest level are realized through the plans or scripts lower down. A theory of coherence may be extrapolated from this, whereby failure of correction at lower level may be referred to at a higher one.

5.1 Schema Refreshment and the Function of Cognitive Change in Literature.

According to Cook in literature there is an attempt to make a connection between formal stylistic, and linguistic analysis on one hand and schema theory on the other, whose result is to bring about coherence in interpretation of the text. Cook develops the idea that literature does have specific function that differentiates it from other discourse types. He calls it the function of cognitive change. It is the function of certain texts to challenge or alter existing schemata in the reader, and literary texts typically carry out this function (Cook, 1994: 182).

Schema theory is supposed to be the essential function in the establishment of coherence. It is a dynamic interaction between linguistic and text -structural form on the one hand, and schematic representations of

the world on the other, whose overall result is to bring about a change in the schemata of the reader. This dynamic interaction is called discourse deviation. This shows the importance of non linguistic knowledge in adopting meaning.

In this respect, Cook (1994) shows that discourse deviation is based on the incorporation of schema theory to a literary discourse. If it is the primary function of a particular category of discourse to affect the refreshment (change) of schemata, it seems likely that this change will take place not at one level, but in correlation with them. Where there is deviation at one or both of the linguistic and text-structural levels, and this deviation interacts with reader's existing schemata to cause schema refreshment, there exists the phenomenon of discourse deviation. The study puts an emphasis on this process as a literary device used by poets to achieve coherence and multiplication of meaning. For example, in one of William Blake's' poems entitled "The Tyger" the deviation relies for more on lexical combinations and grammatically ambiguous structures. The form of the poem which, in interaction with reader's schemata, will create differing interpretation

5.2 The Process of Discourse Deviation.

Cook elaborates his own theory of schemata with discourse deviation to improve the analytical and interpretive potential of Shank and Abelson's' (1975) model applied to literary texts. Cook draws to make a relationship between stylistic, linguistic analysis and schema theory, since both deal with expectations as the norm : "schemata are expectations, and the essence of schema theory is that discourse proceeds, and achieves coherence, by successfully locating the unexpected within a framework of expectations"

(Cook, 1994 : 130). It is the highest level of meaning that can be accounted for by combining schema theory with linguistic analysis.

The concept of schema refreshment and cognitive change are intuitively felt to be necessary categories in the understanding of literary discourse. Cook develops the idea of hierarchy of schemata by establishing three different types corresponding to the processing levels involved : 'language schemata' which operate at the lexico- grammatical level, 'text schemata' which are concerned with rhetorical structures of the text and 'world schemata' which involve knowledge of the world and of discourse contextual factors.

The process of discourse deviation involves a dynamic interaction between linguistic features and reader's mental representation or schemata. The three previous levels are present in the mind of any reader. A readers' expectation about a given text whether it is normal or deviant derives from a comparison of its structure and its language with the readers' pre-existing text schemata and language schemata. This interaction creates illusion of a world in the discourse which can be compared with the world schemata of the reader (Cook, 1994:201).

From the correlation above it can be concluded that deviation or schema refreshment is a relative concept, since it depends on personal and socio – historical variables such as reader differences, time and cultural variation and different genre conventions. For example, what may be deviant and schema refreshing for one reader might not be so for another. Reader's rejection for a kind of a poem might be regarded as a kind of deviation even though there is no such deviation in the text itself. A text which at one time was schema refreshing might not be so any longer.

6. Coherence in Poetry

Literary texts in general and poems in particular are highly coherent pieces of language-use where many levels of content and form unit realizing a complex tissue of interrelations and interdependencies spanning the whole of the text to achieve overall unity. Poems have many aspects of internal coherence such as phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic patterning of reiteration. The extra poetic structure brought about by meter, rhyme, refrains, alliteration, assonance, consonance, regular stanza forms and other poetic devices are sources of coherence.

Semantic coherence is of great importance in poetry. To a certain degree, this coherence is achieved when the successive verse lines are easily related to one another. Thus, the appropriate integration between the poem's verses lines is realized when each new line has a clear semantic relation to the prior material and the present new information. It is a coherent connection between the underlying macrostructure features of the poem (Caroll, 1985: 220).

How this coherence is attained is the job of the poet himself and the reader's approach, as a result of the mode of interaction with the prevailing linguistic, social, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and pragmatic paradigms.

In this respect, schema theory may contribute to the analysis and characterization of coherence in poetry. Schemata can be used as a literary device to trigger reader's perception and to reach an appropriate and coherent interpretation.

7. Schemata in Poetry

Schemata are interconnected in our minds to represent how we perceive, act, react and consider a text. It is a cognitive model used to

recognize different styles of human expression. In the analysis of any poem, we find a correlation of more than one schema at the same time.

The grammar of poetry in any poem shows readers prediction of a variety of conventional lineation and stanza divisions, parallelism, the syntax position of adjective phrase, and the propositional phrase. In addition to the role of lexis and metaphor, they represent text schemata, whether lexis is ordinary words or rather poetic and ambiguous. Metaphor in poems does not only constitute meaning, but reflects schema as which are construction of reality using the assimilation and association of sensorimotor processes to anticipate actions in the world (Lackoff and Johnson). Intertextuality is very important in any poem, because it is related to intertextual meaning. It is intertextual illusions which are used as triggers in creating the schemata of the text of the poem (Cock, 1994: 171).

Schema in poetry reflects the awareness of reader variations and their effect in interpretation. Perception is necessary in approaching schematic aspects in any poem. To make a concrete perception, we make use of existing represented objectivities, previous experiences of the same or similar experiences.

8. Conclusions

In view of what has been discussed earlier, the following are the main findings:

1. The concept of Schemata is used as an active strategy necessary for facilitating the recall of knowledge, and activating text processing as well as coherence.

2. Discourse approach to literature needs to give prominence to the role of reader's schematic knowledge in removing ambiguity and predicting meaning.

3. Writers of literature especially poetry writers use Schemata as a literary device to trigger reader's expectations and experience in the issues and topics discussed.

4. Connection between schemata is necessary to achieve coherence. In literary texts different types of schemata are used (text, language and world schemata) in order to make a correlation between writer's implicit meaning and reader's schematic representation.

5. Schema change (cognitive change) is the primary function of literature. It shows an interaction between linguistic and text structural form on one hand, and schematic representation of the world on the other whose overall result is to bring about a change of reader's Schemata in upholding different thematic possibilities

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تماسك المخططات الإدراكية في الشعر

المستخلص

المخططات الادراكية هي الروابط الموجودة ضمنيا في الذهن التي تفتح الطريق لتجارب ومعلومات جديدة لتضاف الى معارف سابقة. وعندما يقرا الفرد نصا فانه عادة ما يستخدم كل مستويات المخططات الادراكية وهي القابلية على فهم ما يتم ادراكه والمرور به كتجربة في هذا العالم.

ويبذل قراء الشعر عادة مزيدا من التروي تفوق ما يبذلونه في الانواع الاخرى من الخطاب ويتم الحصول على الترابط عندما يدرك القارئ الروابط ما بين المخططات الادراكية. وهذا الترابط هو العلاقة ما بين المميزات اللغوية والنصية في النص والتوقعات الذهنية للقارئ وكذلك المعلومات المخزونة حول ما يدور في العالم.

وتناقش هذه الورقة دور العلاقات المتبادلة للمخططات الادراكية للشعر وكذلك تأثير الخلفيات المختلفة للمخططات الادراكية والاختلافات بين القراء على تغييرها وتفسير المعنى .

المقدمة

تهدف الدراسة الى ان فهم الادب يتطلب تطبيق نظرية المخططات الادراكية ، بانه دور لمعلومات مفعلة اثناء القراءة . يستخدم مفهوم المخططات الادراكية كتمثيل ذهني للمعلومات المخزونة من التجارب السابقة والتي تستخدم في قراءة النصوص الادبية . فان الفكرة الرئيسية هي ان الذاكرة تحفز اما بمصطلحات لغوية في النص او بسياق النص الذي بدوره يحفز المخطط الادراكي لفهم الخطاب .

ان الخاصية المهمة في الادب تعتمد على تغيير المخطط الادراكي للقارىء ، لكونها وظيفة التغيير الادراكي . ان ما يعترض مخطط القارئ الادراكي دائما هو ما يرافقه من انحراف لغوي ، تركيبي وشكلي في تحليل النص . سمى (كول)ظاهرة الانحراف اللغوي مع مخططات القارئ الادراكية بـ"الانحراف الخطابي" .

تتركز الدراسة على دور المخططات الادراكية في تماسك الشعر . وان الفكرة الرئيسية هي ان كون المعلومات الادراكية عنصر مهم في تفسير المعنى وكما هو حال المعلومات اللغوية .