Tikrit University

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English Department

Discourse Analysis

Higher Studies- Ph.D.

Literature, culture, and language discourse

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1.0 Introduction

Learning a language involves an acquisition of the appropriate rules and conventions for using that language. Learning through language involves using language as a means of learning something else, for example, learning how language construes our experience or learning a curriculum subject such as physics or history. Learning about language involves learning something about the nature of language as a system, about how it works and about the kinds of functions it fulfils. Learning about language involves conscious reflection and understanding as opposed to an active linguistic engagement and interaction with the world. The three-part division is in one sense artificial since language learning is a process in which the three dimensions are integrated and an emphasis on any one dimension necessarily requires attention to the other two. However,

Discourse analysis can reveal meanings and patterns in literary text that are not normally revealed by the more traditional commentaries based on grammatical, lexical phonological analysis. Increasingly, literary texts are becoming a subject for discourse analysis; indeed, the term discourse stylistics now refers to the practice of using discourse analysis in the study of literary texts (see Carter and Simpson 1989: 11). Through a contextually oriented approach of this kind much can be revealed: for example, the relationships between characters in novels and plays; the nature of the spoken voice in both prose and poetry; patterns in narrative organization; the differences and similarities between literary non-literary texts as social discourse in contexts of use. Approach also means that questions concerning the relationship between language and culture cannot be ignored. Such questions naturally lead us to consider the relationship between language, text and ideology. In turn, discourse analysis cannot really question: what is literature? Such

questions also have important implications for the use of literature in the classroom, especially in the context of language teaching. Answers to these questions affect the criteria for the division of the world of discourse.

1.1 Conversational Analysis:

Pragmatics and Style Two good starting-points for the analysis of literary discourse are fictional and drama dialogue since the functions of such stretches of language normally require explanation by reference to language organization beyond the sentence or the single conversational turn. Quite often, this will involve 'making sense' of language which on the surface appears to make no sense at all. Modern dramatists, in particular, draw extensively on such patterns of discourse. For example, the famous ending of Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett (1956): VLADIMIR: Well. Shall we go? ESTRAGON: Yes. Let's go. They do not move. (Beckett 1956 Waiting for Godot, London: Faber & Faber, p. 94)

can be shown to be ill-formed because the dialogue does not result in the expected action of leaving. A principle of adjacency seems to be deliberately violated. The dramatist relies on the absurdity inherent in the dialogue to point up a 'theme' of absurdity which is one of Beckett's main preoccupations in the play. Indeed, such dialogue is characteristic of a whole school of drama, called, not unexpectedly, 'the Theatre of the Absurd'. Comparing stretches of dialogue and conversational exchanges can be valuable to language learners. For the more advanced student it can provide a basis for the stylistic analysis and interpretation of drama texts. For less advanced learners it can stimulate reflection on the nature of conversation. The conversations in language course books are inevitably neat and tidy events, symmetrical, polite and geared towards a co-operative exchange of ideas and information. Dramatic texts challenge assumptions and the language embedded within those assumptions and can, by breaking or extending them, serve

to enhance learners' awareness of the rules and conventions of conversational behaviour. The process may even stimulate awareness of the differences between conversations in dramatic texts, conversations in language course-books and real conversations in naturally occurring contexts.

1.2 Analyzing Narratives

Analysis might reveal differences in structure and organization between narratives and at how and why language learners might be made more aware of such differences. Two narratives are compared: one narrative, 'The Auto-pilot', is taken from a widely used EFL/ESL textbook; the other is a naturally occurring narrative recorded at a dinner party There are general similarities in the content of both narratives which allows a clearer focus on structure and organization. they analyzed in terms of Labov's (1972) narrative model. It will help us to assess the extent to which it conforms to norms of narrative organization, particularly given its exemplary status in this part of the course book.

First, there is only minimal 'orientation' in this narrative. The flight is particularized only in so far as 'this particular flight' is made to serve as an exception to the general rules governing 'the flight'. We know the flight runs several times a week and we know the habits of the captain who would (habitually) come to meet passengers while the plane on auto-pilot. Such information contributes to orientation - indeed, iterative verbs are, according to Labov, different from main narrative action verbs in that they supply orientating background to habitual events. But we are not given any more detailed orientation in this narrative. There is little to inform us of 'who, when and where'.

Second, the 'complicating action' or the main burden of narrative action, which is introduced by the adverb 'unfortunately' and which signals the problem

around which most narratives revolve, does not really issue in any 'resolution'. In this respect the narrative appears somewhat truncated, with the reader or listener left asking 'what finally happened?' Similarly, there is no attempt made by the narrator of this story to reflect on the action. Although inferences can be reasonably drawn, there is no discernible 'evaluation'; there is certainly no 'coda' which might offer a moral, based on these events, on the part of either the captain or the narrator. In other words, and at least according to a Labovian account.

1.3 Teaching texts:

curricular principles Five main principles to text-based language teaching are formulated in order to concern curriculum design for language teaching in which texts are central.

1.3.1 The contrastive principle

The awareness of the operation of language in all texts is usually best stimulated when texts are compared and contrasted. The contrasts can take innumerable forms: contrasts in genre or text-type, register, narrative structure, point of view, grammatical and lexical choices or phonological patterning can reveal different meanings, especially if the content or subject matter of the contrasted texts can be kept constant. Contrasting treatments of the same or related content enable a focus on language difference and can do much to promote language awareness. Pedagogies which invite students to rewrite a text from one style or mode to another or to construct a text with contrasting stylistic choices reinforce the same principle, turning perception into productivity through the process of writing and on the basis of the process encouraging reflection on language.

1.3.2 The continuum principle

This principle is related to the contrastive principle to the teaching of literary texts. It states that language development is best supported when students are exposed Language to both literary and non-literary texts but that these terms are not exclusive. A continuum of texts including all kinds of examples of creative and purposeful play with the resources of language needs to be presented, preferably with the texts organized around related themes. Such texts will include work by canonical writers, bilingual writers choosing English as a creative medium and writers whose creative uses of language are explored for a range of purposes from persuasion to simple pleasure.

1.3.3 The inferencing principle

This principle states that it is preferable to teach strategies for cultural and literary understanding. It accepts that almost everything in a language course is capable of carrying a cultural load of some sort and that most texts require a combination of linguistic and cultural knowledge for their reading. It accepts that it is impossible to teach all the cultural facts necessary for interpreting discourse in a second or foreign language and extremely difficult to grade cultural content in such a way as to differentiate significant from less significant knowledge. It accepts the difficulties of teaching courses in literature which adequately represent the literatures of a culture without resorting to factual surveys and chronological overviews. The principle emphasizes the need to design language courses in which some curricular time and space is devoted to teaching actual procedures for making sense of texts. The focus on interpretative procedures and on learning how to

inference should result from some overt and explicit reflection on processes of textual understanding.

1.3.4 Familiar to unfamiliar principle

This principle is well established in theories of learning. In terms of language learning it states that learners are more likely to be motivated to learn a second or foreign language if the texts and contexts designed into a course are culturally familiar. The principle can be manifested in many ways. For example, instead usual native speaker to native speaker discourse, course book , language use in certain countries might include interactions between non-native speakers, or between nonnative and native speakers (interactions with which learners can more readily identify). A course in literary studies might begin with texts drawn from local literatures in English which deal with familiar contexts. Students examine dialogues in which they had been involved.

1.3.5 The critical principle

Language awareness can be generated according to the above and other related curricular principles. However, learners are likely to gain more interest and to be more empowered as educated citizens if they also develop a critical capacity to see through language to the ideologies and values which particular stylistic choices encode. The critical principle provides a basis for language learning to become language education