



Discourse and Literature 话语与文学

Guy Cook



上海外语教育出版社 

牛津应用语言学丛书

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出版前言

这是一部讨论话语与文学关系问题的学术专著。作者 G·库克是伦敦大学教育学院应用语言学高级讲师,从事对外英语的教学和研究工作。H·G·威多森教授担任应用语言学顾问。

本书首先对近年来出现的以交际的社会性为着眼点的话语分析方法作出了评价。有人认为文学是社会交往的一种形式,文学的规范只与特定的时间和地点、特定的社会阶层的读者相联系,文学话语的语言和功能与其他语言形式相比并非别具一格,作者把这种观点称之为“社会性分析法”。他指出,这种分析法无法对一些矛盾的现象作出解释,如文学的无实用价值与它被赋予的极高价值相矛盾。尽管文学作品有时会提供信息或反映社会关系,但这并不是作者写作品和读者读作品的主要意图。相反,各个社会中的文学作品往往描述并不存在的人和事,抒写人们未曾感受过的情感,不过这一切都来源于人们早已熟知的事实,如死亡是痛苦的,大自然是美丽的,爱情是甜蜜的,等等。据此,对于读者如何能从文学作品中获得特殊的价值和乐趣,作者认为需要有一种理论来加以解释。

作者设想,现实中存在着一种与精神感受相互作用的特殊文学话语类型,这种话语对人的头脑起着特殊的作用,复现并改变着人们对世界的主观感受。尽管对于特定的读者而言能实现这一功能的文学作品形式是不同的,但文学作品所产生的效果具有普遍性,满足了普遍的需求。这样一种话语类型起源于某种文学作品形式对于读者业已存在的精神感受所起的作用。这种效果的价值体现了创造这种价值的话语所具有的价值,这样就解释了为什么有些看上去无价值的话语会被赋予如此巨大的价值。作者提出了一种新的文学理论,这是一种吸收了模式理论的长处和认知心理学的研究成果、关于精神感受与文学话语相互发生作用并被文学话语改变的新理论。

在过去的 20 多年中,应用语言学家对话语分析产生了浓厚的兴

趣,所有话语类型中最重要的类型——文学,成了话语分析中的研究热点。文学话语形式的研究不仅是话语研究的重要内容,也是母语和第二语言教学的重要内容,对语言教学法有很大的影响。

本书有助于我国从事文学话语研究的教师、学生、研究人员了解国外对话语分析,特别是文学话语分析的新成果和新观点,开拓视野,推动我国文学话语分析的研究。

本社编辑部

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Lastly, although it is a cliché of an academic preface to say that views expressed by my students have influenced my writing, in this case it is true: most true, I hope, of those opponents of the academic formalization of literary experience with whom I seemed to disagree most fiercely.

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Introduction

The last two decades in applied linguistics have seen a very considerable growth of interest in discourse analysis—the study of how stretches of language take on meaning, purpose, and unity for their users. A substantial proportion of this interest has focused upon the discourse of literature. This is appropriately so, for discourse analysis must be able to account for *all* types of discourse, and, among discourse types, literature is widely if not universally considered to be one of the most important and the most powerful.

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 substantial part of the curriculum in both first and second language education. Our conceptions of literature are bound to influence the way in which we teach it. Continuing exploration of the nature of literature is thus crucial in the applied as well as the theoretical sphere.

Discourse analysis has focused very much upon the social nature of communication, stressing contextual aspects of meaning which are interactive and negotiated, determined by the social relations and identities of the participants in communication. Under the influence of this approach, something of a consensus has emerged in recent years, that literature is just one more genre among equals, functioning in much the same way as others. Particularly influential in the formation of this view has been the Hallidayan conception of language as a social semiotic, and the belief that the function of all discourse is a blend of the interpersonal and ideational. 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 view (let us call it for ease of reference the 'social approach') has developed in understandable reaction against other views of literature, each of which has emphasized some element of the literary experience

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at the expense of others, or taken an element which is present (perhaps only incidentally) in some literary works, and elevated it into a defining characteristic of all literature, often with particularly damaging effects in the classroom.

Firstly, the social approach has rejected 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. This view, in addition to its rather unpleasant reduction of literature to the role of moral tutor or vicarious experience, has a number of weaknesses, which can be revealed by both theory and direct experience. On the theoretical side, it subscribes to a very simple transmission view of communication, and ignores the problem of how superior perception or judgement, if authors do possess these qualities, are conveyed through language. In addition, experience tells us that there are many literary works which seem to be neither moral nor informative, and whose authors were anything but exemplary individuals. In pedagogy, this approach can lead to a rather patronizing morality, a hero-worshipping of authors, and a lack of emphasis on the pleasures (as opposed to the improving effect) of literature.

Secondly, the social approach has rejected the idea that literariness resides in a particular use of language, that it is—in other words—a feature of text rather than discourse. This view is hardly tenable, for a number of reasons which have often been pointed out. Taking a canon of literary works as a whole, one would be hard-pressed to pinpoint any particular uses of language which are common to all of them. Many literary works, on the contrary, seem pointedly to borrow the language of non-literary discourses. Even in the case of the short lyric poem, which is often used to exemplify this view, the linguistic features which may seem distinctive (such as parallelism and creative deviation) are too readily found in supposedly non-literary discourses such as advertisements, journalism, songs, nursery rhymes, political speeches, prayers, chants, and graffiti to make it convincing. In pedagogy a purely linguistic approach can lead to a mechanistic and soulless description of literary texts which leaves the individual reader, and the relevance of literature to his or her world, completely out of account.

Thirdly, the social approach has rejected 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.² This view reduces what could be an instrument of understanding and tolerance between peoples to one which reinforces prejudice. Its pedagogical effects are harmful: when a canon interpreted in this way is imposed upon outsiders it can deny them access to their own cultural heritage, while to insiders, by presenting only texts interpreted in ways which reflect their own

values, it denies the ability of literature to allow us access to ways of seeing which are not our own.

The rejection of these views, each regarding literature as discourse with its own distinctive features, has been strengthened by growing doubts about the validity of a literary canon: a body of texts, clearly circumscribed and separable from others, which are generally agreed to constitute 'Literature' (with a capital 'L')! The first source of doubt has been the growing realization that 'Literature', as conceived in contemporary Western society, is a fairly modern invention (Williams 1983: 183; Foucault [1969] 1979); the second is that the contents of the canon—exactly which texts are deemed to be literature—will vary from age to age and place to place. As the notion of a fixed and unproblematic canon is so central to the literature curriculum, these doubts have either been vituperatively rejected by literature teachers and course designers, or—where they have been taken on board—they have caused a crisis of confidence. The borders between literature and non-literature have become vague and confused, and there seems little left to distinguish the study of literature from the study of language and communication in general.

The force of these arguments against the notion of literature as a fixed or easily identifiable body of texts cannot be denied, and it would be foolish not to take them into account. Clearly any literary canon is relative to a particular time and place, and a particular, socially defined, group of readers. Yet despite the coldly convincing rigour of the social approach and the validity of the points which it raises, there are elements which it leaves out of account. It is not that the social approach, with its emphasis on the relativity of literary judgements, is wrong, but rather that it is incomplete. In addition, like the reigning literary ideologies which it overturned in its day, it too is now in danger of becoming stifling and dogmatic (as perhaps all theories must become in time). Too much emphasis on the social relativity of literature may distract us from the heartening fact that people often *do* seem to find something accessible, beautiful, understandable, enjoyable, and uplifting when they reach out to the literary traditions of societies and social groups which are not their own, and that they can (albeit in the light of background information) recognize in those traditions a common experience which cuts across the boundaries of nation, culture, and history. The social approach, by stressing divisions between people, often seems to deny this.

An aspect of literature which the social approach finds hard to explain is the paradox presented, in widely differing 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

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information, or create social relations and institutions, this does not seem to be the primary motivation for either the writing or the reading of literature. On the contrary, literary texts, in all kinds of societies, often tell us at great length of worlds and people who do not exist, of emotions and experiences which do not affect us. They dwell at length on banal facts which we know already (death is sad, nature is beautiful, love is joyful, etc.), or they create patterns and play with expectations for no apparent reason at all. A theory is needed to explain the extraordinary value and pleasure accorded to such features by very different readers.

What I want to suggest in this book is that there is a type of discourse which has a particular effect on the mind, refreshing and changing our mental representations of the world. While the texts which perform this function will be different for particular individuals or social groups, the effect itself may be universal and answer a universal need. It derives, I believe, from an interaction of textual form with a reader's pre-existing mental representations. It is not, therefore, to be found in a description of either literary form or the reader in isolation, but only in a description of the two together. The value of this effect explains the value attached to the discourses which cause it—hence the high value placed upon some apparently useless discourses. I believe that discourse conventionally classified as literary often fulfils this function, and for this reason the texts I have used to exemplify this effect are from what is generally accepted as the literary canon. But this does not preclude the possibility that works outside the conventional canon may also achieve this effect (though in my view, to avoid the argument becoming circular, this would in fact make them literary).

My argument demands descriptions both of literary forms and of readers' minds, so it will range across a number of theories of literature, psychology, and discourse from different periods of the twentieth century, seeking insights which will provide components of the theory I wish to develop. As these areas are so diverse, it may be helpful to give an outline of the structure of the book and the focus of each chapter in advance.

Part One considers a number of approaches both to discourse in general and to literature in particular, assessing both their strengths and weaknesses in the description of literary effect. Chapter 1, which provides a basis for a description of mental representations and the effect of literature upon them, considers schema theory, which has its origins in the Gestalt psychology of the 1920s, and has since become firmly established in applied linguistics and discourse analysis. Chapter 2 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. Chapter 3 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. It explores in detail some of ideas from Artificial Intelligence (AI) and discusses both how they may contribute to a description of literary discourse, and also some of their incapacity to do so. In Chapter 4, these modes of analysis are brought to bear upon two problematic texts: a translation, 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 to be considered by most readers literary. Chapter 5 surveys and assesses some twentieth-century literary theories which claim to provide both a description of literary language and form, and of their effect on the reader. It traces a tradition from Russian formalism, through structuralism and stylistics, to reader-response and reception theory. Chapter 6 continues the history begun in Chapter 5. In an analysis of two problematic texts, a synthesis is attempted between an analysis of form and of the mental representations of a reader, attempting 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 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. Chapter 8 demonstrates this theory in the detailed analysis of three literary texts (William Blake's 'The Tyger', Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and Gerard Manley Hopkins' 'The Windhover') all of which are both favourites in literary pedagogy and have attracted considerable scholarly analysis and disagreement.

The implications of this approach for pedagogy, which have been put to one side during the development of the argument, are considered again in Chapter 9.

Notes

- 1 My use of the term 'reader' rather than 'audience' is deliberate. I deal throughout with the experience of literature as one of reading, and my theory does not necessarily extend to non-literate societies. In literate societies, though poems and plays—and even novels—may be performed, they are also read.
- 2 Carey (1992), in a survey of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary reputations, provides a convincing and extremely well-documented account of how the British literary educational establishment has excluded works of high quality written by or for the newly literate middle classes.

PART ONE