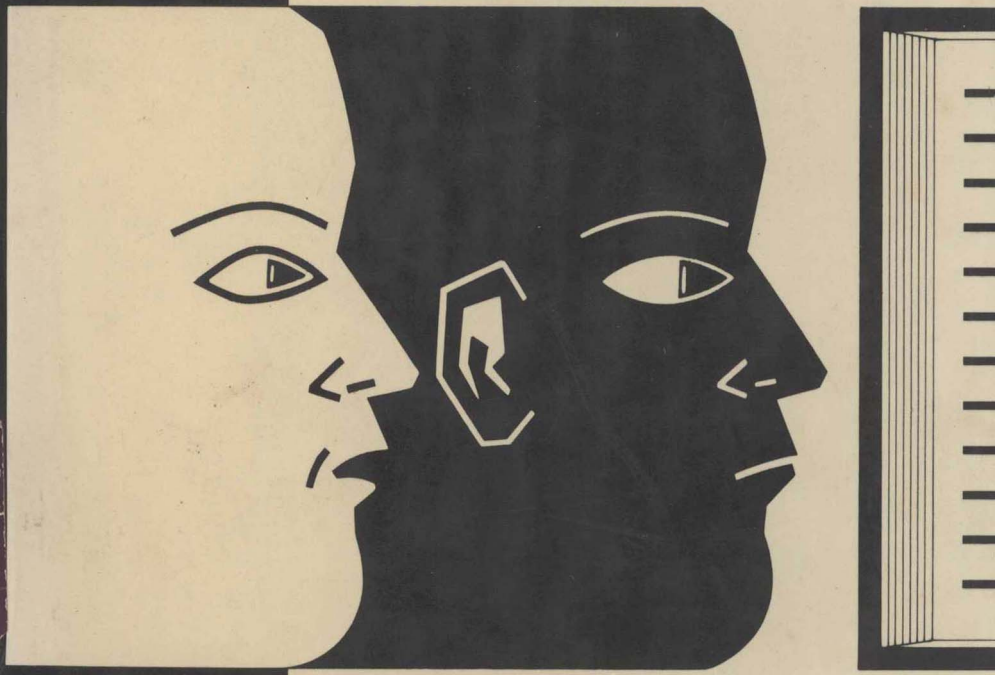
RECEPTION & RESPONSE

Hearer Creativity and the Analysis of Spoken and Written Texts



Edited by Graham McGregor and R. S. White

Reception and Response

Hearer Creativity and the Analysis of Spoken and Written Texts

Edited by
Graham McGregor
R.S. White

Routledge
London and New York

First published 1990
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge
a division of Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Printed in Great Britain
by T.J. Press, Padstow, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
also available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Reception and response : hearer creativity and the analysis of spoken and written texts / edited by Graham McGregor, R.S. White.
p. cm.
Bibliography: p.
ISBN 0-415-01075-6
1. Listening. 2. Oral communication. 3. Hermeneutics.
4. Criticism. I. McGregor, Graham. II. White, R. S., 1948– .
P95.46.R44 1990 89-10491
302.2'42—dc20 CIP

Reception and Response

Notes on the contributors

CHRISTINE CALLENDER has a degree in English and Education from Roehampton Institute, where she specialized in linguistics, with a particular interest in the language of the black community. She is a part-time youth worker and is currently training as a teacher.

DEBORAH CAMERON studied linguistics at the Universities of Newcastle upon Tyne and Oxford, and now teaches the subject at Roehampton Institute, London. She is author of *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London, Macmillan, 1985) and joint author with Talbot Taylor of *Analysing Conversation* (Oxford, Pergamon, 1987).

SUSAN CORDWELL taught young children and adults with acute learning difficulties, psychiatric patients, and prisoners before doing an MA in Women's Studies. She is now working full-time in primary school and teaching on gender issues in continuing and higher education in Sheffield.

MARK CORNER teaches Religious Studies at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. He is interested in approaches to biblical interpretation, and is currently working on a book concerned with the use of the Bible in the theology of liberation.

JUSTINE COUPLAND is Research Associate at the University of Wales, Cardiff, Centre for Applied English Language Studies. She is co-editor of *Contexts of Accommodation: Developments in Applied Sociolinguistics* (forthcoming, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press). Other published work, in stylistics, discourse analysis, and gerontological sociolinguistics appears in *Language in Society*, *Language and Communication*, and *Textual Practice*.

NIKOLAS COUPLAND is Director of the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Wales, Cardiff. He is author of *Dialect in Use: Sociolinguistic Variation in Cardiff English* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1988), editor of *Styles of Discourse* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988) and coeditor of three other books due to appear in the near future. His other published work is principally in the areas of sociolinguistic style, discourse variation, and gerontological sociolinguistics and appears in journals such as *Language in Society*, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, *Language and Communication* and *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. With Howard Giles, he codirects an interdisciplinary ESRC research programme entitled 'Communication and the Elderly'.

CHRISTINE DEVONSHIRE taught English in Comprehensive Schools before doing an MA in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel at East Anglia University. She has taught EFL in Italy and established women's literature classes for the WEA and in the Department of Continuing Education, University of Sheffield while teaching part-time at Newcastle University. She has written articles on contemporary European women writers, contributed nineteenth-century entries for a forthcoming companion to women's writing in English and is completing doctoral research on the 'sensation' novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Sheffield, where she lives with her daughter.

HOWARD GILES is Professor of Social Psychology and Director of the Centre of Communication and Social Relations at the University of Bristol. He is founding editor of both the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* and a forthcoming annual on language and communication in the Pacific Rim as well as being general editor of three books series relating to social psychology and language. He has published widely in the areas of language attitudes, speech accommodation theory, and intercultural communication.

PETER GOODRICH is a lecturer in law at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne where he teaches jurisprudence. He gained his LLB from Sheffield University and PhD from the University of Edinburgh before teaching law at Liverpool Polytechnic. He has published two books – *Reading the Law* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986) and *Legal Discourse* (London, Macmillan, 1987) as well as numerous articles, and is currently working on a book on the

grammatology of the common law tradition for Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

KAREN HENWOOD graduated with a BSc in psychology from the University of Bristol in 1981 and gained a doctorate in social psychology from the same university in 1987. She has been a joint small research grant holder from the Nuffield Foundation with Howard Giles, investigating intergenerational stereotyping and speech accommodation. From 1985, she has been employed as Research Associate on the ESRC funded interdisciplinary (applied linguistics and social psychology) project on 'Communication and the Elderly', directed by Howard Giles and Nikolas Coupland.

DEBORAH HILLS is a graduate of the Roehampton Institute in London. She is now teaching English at Epsom College, Surrey.

IAN MASON is a senior lecturer in French at the University of Heriot Watt, where his major research interest is in translation theory. He undertook his undergraduate and doctoral research at the Queen Mary College in London. He is coauthor of two language teaching texts, *Français en Faculté* and *Lyon à la Une*, and currently working on similar material in Spanish for a multimedia course.

GRAHAM McGREGOR teaches sociolinguistics and English language at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne where he has been a lecturer since 1978. He is editor of *Language for Hearers* (Oxford, Pergamon, 1986) and coeditor with R.S. White of *The Art of Listening* (London, Croom Helm, 1986). He has published a number of papers on the theme of conversational inferencing by third-persons in journals such as *Language and Communication* and *Language and Speech*.

JOHN PELLOWE has taught linguistics at universities in England, Libya, and China. He is well known for his scholarly contributions to sociolinguistics and currently teaches DIY syntax at the National University of Singapore, where he is a senior lecturer.

RICHARD TEDESCHI received his BA in psychology from Syracuse University in 1972 and his PhD in clinical psychology from Ohio University in 1976. He served his clinical psychology internship at North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill

from 1975 to 1976. Since then he has held a faculty position at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte where he is currently Associate Professor of Psychology. During 1987 he was Visiting Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

ROBERT SHARPE is Professor of Philosophy at St David's University College, University of Wales. He has particular interests in aesthetics, the aesthetics of music, and Freud, and is author of *Contemporary Aesthetics* (London, Harvester, 1986).

R.S. WHITE is Professor of English at the University of Western Australia. He grew up in Sydney and was educated at Adelaide (law and arts) and Balliol College, Oxford. He has held positions as Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and Visiting Research Fellow at the Australian National University. He has published many articles and four books on Shakespeare, the latest of which is *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare* (London, Athlone, 1987).

Contents

Introduction

Graham McGregor and R.S. White

This collection reflects widespread interest in an idea that was first mooted in a previous volume for Croom Helm, McGregor, G. and White, R.S. (eds) *The Art of Listening* (1986), and in a more specifically linguistic context by McGregor, G. (ed.) *Language for Hearers* (1986). In essence, the idea is that the active and creative abilities of listeners and readers deserve as much attention as the skills of speakers and writers. As a result of both these projects, we became increasingly convinced of the wider implications of the idea, and its potential application, across and within different disciplinary contexts. Subsequent correspondence and discussion with individuals from widely differing subject backgrounds have not only reinforced our own conviction but also encouraged us to extend and develop the idea.

Each essay in the present collection builds upon a *recipient*-rather than a *production*-centred approach to the analysis of spoken and written texts. The notion of recipiency is inextricably tied to the notion of response since for us reception *is* response, and response *is* reception. In other words, we are not dealing here with discrete categories but simultaneous processes that are dynamically active as a consequence of individual creativity, selectivity and/or reactivity to *language use* in whatever medium or variety. We focus on the role of *hearers* and *readers* because it is they, as receiver–responders, who are the actual arbiters of what becomes meaningfully determinant in an interpretive sense. It is thus their achievements, their contributions, their skills which principally concern us here.

A corollary of the perspective adopted in the collection is that divisions between subject areas are at best artificial and at worst designed to promote concepts of elitist mystification of knowledge. Consequently, although a number of the contributions may be identified with particular subject areas, such as law, psychotherapy, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, or within some newly-

existing theoretical framework, like reception theory or reader-response criticism, individual authors have contributed to the general philosophy of the volume by *responding*, in their own ways, to issues and debates that we hope will be both comprehensible and stimulating for readers with widely differing interests. In order to accommodate these interests, the collection has been organized to reflect three major themes.

In Part one, **Contexts of responsiveness**, four essays consider the social significances of listening in quite disparate settings – the law court, the psychotherapeutic interview, and radio phone-in programmes. The theoretical and practical implications of recipiency in each setting are weighed by each of the authors, demonstrating the very narrow constraints of much of our listening practice.

Peter Goodrich argues in Chapter 1 that lay images of law are fostered by both the legal community and by the media. The perception of legal discourse as objective, rule-governed, and unequivocal is challenged in the light of different responses within the courtroom and particularly by juries, litigants, witnesses, and lay advocates. Detailed examination of particular cases is used in order to deconstruct the predominantly objectivist versions of legal argumentation.

In Chapter 2, Richard Tedeschi works from the basis that listening is at the very core of all therapeutic activities. He considers the contribution of important psychotherapists to the development of therapeutic listening and identifies three components of the listening process: the selective attention to particular aspects of the client's disclosures, the formulation of a therapeutic response, and the client's perception of that response as s/he listens to the therapist. The difficulties and pitfalls of therapeutic listening are confronted within this framework, and the activity compared to other types of listening practice.

Chapter 3, by Deborah Cameron and Deborah Hills, focuses on the medium of radio in terms of the virtually unique status it accords to the category of *listeners*. The genre of the 'phone-in' constitutes their primary interest because it entails a constant renegotiation of the roles of *speaker* and *listener* by presenters, callers, and studio guests, as well as being subject to various constraints that are a consequence of the existence of a mass of inaudible, yet ever-present listeners. Examination of the ways in which these negotiations are handled by presenters shows how relationships are managed both with actual callers and the generalized audience – the 'listeners out there'.

Finally in this section, John Pellowe explores the concept of 'context' itself. By detailed discussion of how the term has been used and continues to be used in a confused and confusing way, the essay confronts a problem that has perplexed scholars since modern linguistic study began, namely how to decide 'What is context?' or 'What is the context?' of some particular linguistic act. However, if we focus on the issue of recipiency, these questions need to be rephrased. Thus Pellowe explores the ramifications, for language study, of asking, '*Who* is context'? or '*Who* is the context?' of some communicative sequence.

Part two is titled **Listener response and communication.** It presents four essays which seek to analyse interpretive behaviour and strategies in social interactions ranging from everyday communicative events, intergenerational discourse, and the oral mode of translation, to Black Pentecostal church services.

Graham McGregor considers a special case of interpretive work in Chapter 5; that of third-party inferencing-making. This work is based on the ideas of Harvey Sacks and John Gumperz in particular, and responds to the need to provide a closer understanding of how linguistic and social knowledge interact in discourse interpretation. The research presented involves various studies of 'eavesdropping', that is, the means by which different third-person participant and non-participant judges make sense of tape-recorded extracts taken from everyday verbal exchanges. This method enables the exploration of communicative norms and processes that are not normally verbalized by participants in talk. Its methodological and theoretical implications are considered thereafter.

The experience of age and ageing in social encounters and between social groups is investigated in Chapter 6 by Nikolas Coupland *et al.* They show that the discourse of talk between different generations is more than descriptively interesting, since it can expose the interplay of generational wishes and needs, beliefs, stereotypes, and assumptions, fulfilment, and dissatisfactions. Their essay examines one complex of strategies – to do with the disclosure of 'painful', personal information – in intergenerational talk, realized in a corpus of video-taped interactions involving young and elderly women. These strategies are characterized through detailed discourse analyses, and set against attitudinal data based on a comparable young female population's reports of the elderly's and their own beliefs about self-disclosive talk. The implications of these intergenerational patterns (behavioural and cognitive) are discussed in terms of

speech accommodation theory, and a model of psycho-socio-linguistic interaction is premissed on considerations of recipiency.

Ian Mason deals with the oral mode of translating, known more generally as simultaneous translation, in Chapter 7. This mode is compared to written translating, where the translator's response to a source text is subject to all kinds of modifications before it appears in the form of a target text and hence raises difficulties if one attempts to recover the translator's immediate response during the reading process. In the oral mode of simultaneous interpreting, however, the translator's response is immediate, can be heard directly if we tune into the translator's output, and is as a consequence presumably much closer to the actual listening process. Comparison of five trainee interpreters' output from the same source text provides striking evidence of differences in their 'text worlds' as listeners.

The fourth essay in this section, by Christine Callender and Deborah Cameron (Chapter 8), contests the view that preaching can be described in rather simple terms as a speech event where one active speaker dominates an essentially passive congregation. They analyse the conventions of Black Pentecostal worship at two London churches. Sermons in Pentecostal contexts are clearly interactive performances structured by the creative abilities and interventions of listening members of the congregation, and indeed by the preacher listening to his flock. Observations about the nature of these performances are linked to the work of Max Atkinson on the nature of political oratory, and to ethnographic studies of black verbal culture in general.

We complete the volume (Part three) with a change of medium from spoken to written language use, and in particular to the case of the **responsive reader**. The section opens with an essay by Robert Sharpe on the subject of reader response criticism. It begins by considering this approach in the context of other literary critical modes such as text-based criticism (New Criticism) and post-structuralist theory. The essay then traces the development of reader response theory and goes on to examine its relevance to critical practice. It is argued that some aspects of literature and, indeed, some literary styles can benefit from reader response theory but that, in general, it has limitations; namely, the limitations imposed by acceptable interpretation.

The antithesis to this approach is one of interpretative diversity and open-endedness. From limit setting, the following three chapters return to the theme of individual creative responsiveness, and the fertile possibilities of reader-oriented analysis. Thus in Chapter 10, Christine Devonshire and Susan Cordwell provide a

comparison of how four very different groups (taught by themselves) responded to Nadine Gordimer's novel, *Burger's Daughter*. The book is essentially about the search for a personal voice, where the capacity to hear it is part of self-definition. By examining how far the expectations of teachers and students help to determine what is heard both in the text and in particular responses to it, the authors present a uniquely feminist perspective that offers much in the way of critical insight and challenge.

When the text happens to be the Bible, rather than a novel, the volume of its readership and the plurality of that readership's reading increases exponentially. Biblical criticism initially thought of its task as an historical one, as Mark Corner points out in Chapter 11. It would recover the intentions of the authors of Scripture, identifying their sources and placing them within the cultural context of the ancient world. New forms of biblical criticism associated with structuralism, literary critcism, and the theology of liberation have challenged the confidence of the 'historical' approach in its task, and have pointed to the importance of studying the context in which the Bible is read and heard today as well as that in which it was written. The author concludes that both aspects must be integrated into the process of interpretation. Hence, just as nineteenth-century biblical criticism drew upon an interest in history that affected the classical scholars of the time, so contemporary biblical criticism draws upon an interest in hermeneutics that has profound implications across many disciplines.

In the final essay of the volume, R.S. White proclaims 'the birth of the reader'. He does so by making it clear that neither traditional approaches to literary criticism, nor newer theoretical models, can justly define the limits of debate. If the author is dead, and the text neutral, then the reader is, and always has been, creatively active and very much alive. The contribution of individual knowledge and experience to reading practice is evaluated in the light of of a process that is not merely passive reception of finite material, but the art of selecting and creating personal sense.

In the process of compiling any collection such as this, there are all manner of readings and responses, re-readings, responses to outside readers' reports, letters to the publisher, letters to contributors, the exercise of patience and abandonment to impatience, conversations which can be excited or gloomy. A kind of closure comes only when an artefact exists which did not exist before, when it is ready for readers to take over. Then it

appears to have a singleness or simplicity of existence that belies all the chaos from which it came. This kind of closure, however is an illusion, for when the book is plucked from a library shelf, a whole new process, an open-ended and limitless one, begins as ideas grow in unexpected ways.

Within such a book, seams may show between essays as a result of internal contradictions, holes in the logic, or disagreements in the content. However, it has not been our purpose as editors to try to conceal or to patch up for the sake of achieving cosmetic unity of material. This is partly because the subjects and individual responses of our contributors were too diverse to submit to homogenization, and more importantly because we believe that any 'statement', whether written or spoken, contains rifts that should be acknowledged as windows to new meanings rather than condemned as flaws. It is these that can potentially be the most creative aspects of the enterprise, giving readers unanswered questions, provisional answers ripe for re-opening, tantalizing hints in new directions, dark spaces illuminated.

Beneath all the editorial self-doubts and worries encountered along the way, what has emerged is a strengthening of our conviction in the timeliness and importance of developing theories of 'listening' that are sensitive to the creativity of receptive responsiveness. An almost universal mode of analysis in all fields of thought has underwritten and perpetuated the idea that our's is a civilization whose accomplishments are manifest in literary and verbal performance. A hungry, impatient media waits to cite the words of belligerent leaders, and is avid for 'news'. Debate is dominated by articulate and eloquent, if not necessarily moral forces. Advertising flourishes by the persuasiveness and relentlessness of its 'messages'. Consumer responsiveness is sought only in the name of profit. Self-appointed authorities express outrage in the name of safeguarding 'standards' of speaking and writing, public order and morality. The writers of words and images have their say, and are traditionally paid loving and relatively uncritical attention.

Where there is dogma and social injustice, there is also an inherent deafness to real need, and power is misappropriated where the desire to listen is effectively abandoned. The impulse behind this collection is to allow a backing away from such procedures of reasoning, to highlight their stark contradictions even at the risk of revealing our own, rather than pretending these can be glibly explained away or disguised in rhetoric. If there is to be social progress, it must come by listening in good faith, and this means without motive or prejudice, without

manipulating the 'voice' of power in order to control.

Can there be such progress in the complex and difficult world in which we live? Yes, there can. But this requires us to unpick some of our deepest assumptions about the dangerously self-destructive environment human beings have created (however unwittingly) for themselves. We suggest that new beginnings will always be possible where, and when, reception *is* response.

Final words must go to all those who have contributed to the volume. The project owes its life to the receptiveness and responsiveness of our co-writers, and we offer sincere thanks for their unselfish sharing of ideas. Special thanks also to Alison Gallagher for typing the manuscript and to helping with the preparation of what was to be camera-ready-copy. Judy Baker wrote a special programme for laser printing, and though this too was unused we are grateful for her work and advice. For permission to quote from her work, we are grateful to Elizabeth Jolley; for permission to quote from A.F. Parker-Rhodes, we are grateful to his heir and executor Adam Parker-Rhodes.

Elaine and Jane have seen us through another volume with all that this implies; our appreciation of their love and suppport is immeasurable.