

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Discourse analysis embraces practically all the schools of critical theory that have emerged since the late 1950s, concomitantly with the passage from structuralism to post-structuralism and semiotics. Discourse means language in a context of use (Cook, 1989, page 29), the new method being first applied by Zellig Harris to the analysis of some advertisements (1953), that is, to that type of utterance, twin born with the consumer society, which bridges text and usage, text and world, as their aim is to induce certain types of action and response. Discourse analysis studies all acts of speech, all utterances, from an interjection to a three-decker (three-volume novel of the Victorian Age). It studies language in a three-dimensional framework: (1) the knowledge, ideology, worldview incorporated in a stretch of text (cognitive values), (2) the social relationships constructed through language, and (3) the formal characteristics and the connectives that construct a text's cohesion "according to a certain world-view" (Levorato 2003: 13). Our paper is probing into the first two layers of discursive values, which are constitutive of what we might call content of discourse in counter-distinction to its form.

Keywords: discourse analysis, cognitive values, interpersonal values, discursive construction of social relationships

Fairy tales, according to Alessandra Levorato (Levorato 2003: X), "are the first important socializing event in children's lives," and she goes on to say that the language of these tales does in fact "code an entire world-view, a perspective in which language is bound to prove both an instrument of maintenance as well as change" (Ibid.). Levorato locates the subversive rewriting of fairy tales in modernism and postmodernism, both period terms designating the age of rebellion against modernity's grand narratives of the cult of reason, of Europe's superiority over the colonized nations, of empiricism and scientism. She mentions the 1939 brief counter-narrative *The Little Girl and the Wolf* by James Thurber. Levorato points out the significant change in the cast of characters: Little Red Riding Hood is left on her own to deal with the Wolf, without advice from mother or from grandmother. She has instead the benefit of the modern age of cinema with its ubiquitous reach of worldly lore, with its enlightening images that can substitute for personal experience or advice from a patriarchal family, as well as its advanced

technology which is apt to lend more power even to a fragile but no longer naive child:

When the little girl opened the door of her grandmother's house she saw that there was somebody in bed with a nightcap and nightgown on. She had approached no nearer than twenty-five feet from the bed when she saw that it was not her grandmother but the wolf, for even in a nightcap a wolf does not look any more like your grandmother than the Metro-Goldwyn lion looks like Calvin Coolidge. So the little girl took an automatic out of her basket and shot the wolf dead.

(Moral: It is not so easy to fool little girls nowadays as it used to be.)

Writing in the early 80s, which knew the New Historicist turn, Roald Dahl (*Revolting Rhymes*, 1982) imagines history as a succession of styles, a sort of palimpsestic over layering of personal scripts. The Wolf expects Little Red Riding Hood to follow the pattern in the original tale and ask him the well-known questions. Times have changed, though, and the little girl is now acting in the victimizer's script, changing roles with the beast which becomes her victim. She has turned pragmatic and fashion-conscious, as well as conversent with the twisted, unexpected ends of detective novels:

Then Little Red Riding Hood said, "But Grandma,
what a lovely great big furry coat you have on."

"That's wrong!" cried Wolf. "Have you forgot
To tell me what BIG TEETH I've got?
Ah well, no matter what you say,
I'm going to eat you anyway."
The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers.
She whips a pistol from her knickers.
She aims it at the creature's head
And *bang bang bang*, she shoots him dead.
A few weeks later, in the wood,
I came across Miss Riding Hood.
But what a change! No cloak of red,
No silly hood upon her head.
She said, "Hello, and do please note
My lovely furry wolf skin coat."

Our main interest, therefore, is to demonstrate that the cognitive, interpersonal and expressive values found in the language of these tales have a real and significant bearing on the depiction of

gender roles and power relationships. More specifically, we are concerned with the uses of these tales, namely, either to confirm the importance of language in the shaping of the mind (ideological perspective on life), and of social relationships (traditional male hegemony and female helplessness), or to challenge that hegemony with images of female independence, strength, and resourcefulness- as found in Angela Carter's stories for example.

Our approach is grounded in the work of theorists and practitioners such as Guy Cook, Roger Fowler, Norman Fairclough, among others, the methodological framework being that synthesis of post-structural and interdisciplinary theories that accompanied the rise of functional grammars: Critical Discourse Analysis. Subsumed are a variety of methods such as quantitative analysis, grammatical analysis, and considerations of intertextuality. We are going to introduce each theory and each kind of analysis in turn, while also putting their explanatory potential to the test as interpretive grids applied to various texts.

The interaction of texts and worlds, the way the former create a reality effect which in its turn will feed into a textual world, are studied by critical theories employed as other than discourse analysis: feminism, postcolonial studies, identity studies, gender studies, social psychology, cognitive psychology, deconstructionist philosophy, social criticism, psycho-linguistics, pragmatics, genre studies, discourse grammar, etc., which, according to Danish semiologists Jørgen Dines Johansen and Svend Erik Larsen (*Signs in Use, An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2002) are reunited under the umbrella of generalized semiotics or discourse analysis. Text grammar, or 'discourse grammar', refers to language beyond the sentence boundary, and in a real, not invented, context of use.

This mutual shaping of text/speech and context begins early in the history of the individual's being in the world. A child will spend more time playing games on a computer than talking to his parents or grandparents. He lives in Baudrillard's hyperreality of images disseminated by the media or in virtual reality. That is why the texts and images a child is exposed to are extremely important in his becoming as social being.

Before going into this important chapter of an educationalist's concern for the type of personality that will both inhabit and create the society of the years to come, we need to define our concepts and map our territory.

What is Discourse Analysis? The discourse analysts we mentioned earlier place emphasize different aspects of a theory which has come to incorporate the whole corpus of postwar critical studies. Guy Cook is more interested in discourse analysis as the study of language in context, whether the notion applies to an interjection (*wau*) or the three-volume novel of the Victorian Age. Norman Fairclough is more interested in the social or communicational aspect. He defines

language as that site on which a message is sent from an illocutionary source to an interpreter (reader/ interlocutor). Roger Fowler would like to see the study of linguistic structure being placed again at the centre of the literature classroom. Our approach will draw on all of them, as we consider that the formal and the social components of analysis complement each other. As Roger Fowler argues in *Linguistic Criticism* (Fowler 1986: 76), extra structure conveys extra meanings.

I.1. Cognitive Values, or Discourse as the Repository of Experience

Cognitivists are far from consensus when it comes to the definition of cognitive values. Philosophers of science tend to ascribe them truth-value, whereas a discourse analyst such as Norman Fairclough will limit their validity to social acceptability. They are just conventions, discourse models or member resources depending on local knowledge or rather on what is taken for genuine knowledge by a community of discourse:

Linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena. Linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects. (Fairclough, 1989: 23).

At the other end of the controversy, philosophers of science insist upon the necessity of setting up criteria for validating what passes for convention as truth value, for going beyond empiricist contextualism in order to determine theory-choice. Here is Helen E. Longino's design of that kind of transformative criticism that allows a community to change subjective interaction into objective checks of mutual validity (Longino 1996: 39):

1. There must be publicly recognized forums for the criticism of evidence, of methods, and of assumptions and reasoning." It is the specialists' who decide what methods of analysis should be used of common agreement in order to examine data and situations.
2. There must be uptake of criticism. The community must not merely tolerate dissent, but its beliefs and theories must change over time in response to the critical discourse taking place within it." Ideas, beliefs, assumptions, rules are promoted in society and society tries to model itself in order for everyone to fit in it. Once the society establishes a certain role for men and for women (that is the patriarchal model) the society will be driven by this, whereas when society shifts to a more liberal status between men and women, a whole new perspective on discourse is promoted. This change of looking at the women's place in society is done through discourse and criticism to the previous state of affairs.

3. There must be publicly recognized standards by reference to which theories, hypotheses and observational practices are evaluated and by appeal to which criticism is made relevant to the goals of the inquiring community. Such standards serve as ideals regulating normative discourse in a community. That is, by explicitly or implicitly professing adherence to those standards individuals and communities adopt criteria of adequacy by which their cognitive activity may be evaluated. The satisfaction of goals of inquiry is not ascertained privately, but by evaluation with respect to shared values and standards. This evaluation may be performed by anyone, not just by members of the community sharing all standards. Furthermore, standards are not a static set, but may themselves be criticized and transformed, in reference to other standards, goals, or values, held temporarily constant. Indeed, the presupposition of reliance on such standards is that they have survived similar critical scrutiny.” People try to conform to standards in order to live the satisfaction that they get from everyone acknowledging the fulfillment of the standards set a priori and from the certainty that they achieved the standards. The community sets the standards, the values.
4. Finally, communities must be characterized by equality of intellectual authority. What consensus exists must be the result not of the exercise of political or economic power, or of the exclusion of dissenting perspectives, but a result of critical dialogue in which all relevant perspectives are represented. This criterion is meant to impose duties of inclusion; it does not require that each individual, no matter what their past record or state of training, should be granted equal authority on every matter.” The members of the community have equal rights in matters of intellectual authority, and everyone is equally important as far as their opinion is. That is everyone’s intellectual output matters.

Our position is closer to the narrativist point of view, as narratives are simulation models of human experience, the medium whereby humans make sense of their being in the world. Whereas the truths of science are invalidated by subsequent theories, stories preserve their capacity to “move individuals to thought reflection and belief” (Stroud 2008: 19). Cognitivist accounts, Stroud says, “discuss the value of literary narrative in terms of conveyed truths or knowledge. “. On the contrary, the “Subjective Knowledge Theory”[...] places its value in the subjective perspectives or experience the narrative opens up to the reader. Thus, one can gain knowledge of “what it is like to be caught in the throes of jealousy, endangered by an opposing army, or captivated by the lure of a magical prowess.”(Ibid.).

We would like to point out one more aspect of literary narratives, which involves cognition, not of the world, but of “member resources”, as Fairclough calls them, that is, knowledge of the world’s library of mythopoetic tradition.

We are going to apply the Subjective Knowledge Theor to a narrative by Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), Romania's national poet, who also wrote fantastic stories and a fairy-tale entitled *Prince Charming of the Tear*. The poet's erudite use of the mytho-poetic tradition makes it intelligible to a readership that may not be familiar, either with the poet's life story or with his land.

The Three Paradises of Mihai Eminescu's *Prince Charming of the Tear*

Mihai Eminescu's highly imaginative and poetic tale is built, in romantic fashion, on a basic antinomy: warfare versus brotherly communion, spiritual barrenness versus spiritual plenitude. Kingship is set within a frame reminding one of characteristic medieval features which are part of any schoolchild's knowledge of history: blood feuds, inherited from one generation to another, the right to heritage, including the throne, along male lines. Eminescu superimposes on this well-known script a poet's metaphoric correlative: the heritage of hate and destruction is associated with infertility, the royal couple being childless:

Fifty years had passed since the King was at war with a neighbouring Kingdom. The neighbour King had died and left behind his fortune to his sons and nephews, the hate and division of blood. Fifty years and the King had lived alone, like an aging lion, weakened by fight and suffering—a King who had never laughed in his life, not at children's songs, not at the amorous smile of his young loving wife, or at the old funny tales of knights aged by battles and needs. He felt weakened; he felt he was dying having no one to pass his fortune on to. Saddened, he'd rise from his regal bed where the young Queen lay—a golden bed, yet empty and unblessed.—Saddened he'd go to war with an untamed heart; and his Queen remained alone, crying with widow tears in her loneliness.

(web: <https://yasniger.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/1350/>)

The circumstance that it is the queen who redeems their lives is related to the reader's knowledge of the Bible: it was Virgin Mary who reversed the fall through Eve. The Virgin sheds a tear from its icon, which the queen "sucks into the depths of her soul". We notice the double ontological transgression: the inanimate object sheds a tear, which the queen absorbs, not into her body but into her immaterial soul. The redeeming change does not occur in the materiality of our human condition but in our conscience:

Rising from her bed she threw herself on the steps of an arched wall, guarded from above a flickering candle by the silver icon of Virgin Mary. Yielded by the kneeling Queen's prayers the cold eye lids of the icon moistened and a tear dropped from the black eye of the mother of God. The Queen stood up in all her height and with her lip she touched the cold tear and sucked it into the depths of her soul. From that moment on, the Queen was with child.

The enemy king makes peace with Prince Charming, and two services rendered by the latter seals their brotherhood. Social peace, human communion bring about promise of regeneration, as the Prince's two errands secure a bride for each of them.

What do the Prince's antagonists stand for?

Society is set over and against nature. Prince Charming confronts and destroys The Forest-Mum. Man becomes what he is by rising above the earth, the materiality of his biological origin through nurture, education and culture. This change, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play full of alchemical symbols, is a sea-change: from water as a natural element (aqua vitae) to the spirit, argentum vitae or lapis. The Forest-Mum is forced to drink pure water, while the Prince drinks power, pure energy.

Argetum vitae, silver, is the revelation of the spirit, lapis philosophorum. Princess Ileana has been spinning silver, waiting for the prince, born like Jesus through immaculate conception to appear before her, to be revealed in front of her:

“Welcome Prince” said she with glistening half closed eyes “It's been a long time since I've dreamed of you...when my fingers were spinning, my thoughts were spinning a dream, a beautiful dream, in which we were in love; Tear-Drop Prince, I was spinning silver and I was spinning one for you, one specially made to keep curses away, sewn with happiness; so you can wear it...and love me. I'd make you a robe with all my days, with a full life of caress.”

Humanity is opposed to nature, being defined by understanding, by the powers of the mind, of the spirit:

If anyone could understand the weeping of the river, they could have understood in a long lament the voice of Ileana, the fair-haired Queen of the Tear-Drop Prince. But who could understand the voice of the river in the wilderness where no man had ever been before?

The parallel with Jesus, the incarnated spirit, is superimposed over alchemical resurrection of the spirit out of water (the albedo, purification stage of the alchemical process). The two mythological matrices – alchemical and biblical merge together so that the unity and universality of the spirit might be emphasized:

The Prince followed with his gaze the face of St. Peter and could no longer see God as any more than a bright light on the horizon, as if the sun were setting. He understood the miracle of his resurrection and kneeled towards the Holy Sunset.

Midnight is the nigredo stage of the alchemical process – unredeemed matter, death, the shadows of the pagan underworld. Midnight and her slave resort to black magic, like Sicorax in *The Tempest*. The Prince has a vision of the white skeletons absorbed by the moon, the triple goddess in Greek mythology (Cynthia in heaven, Diana on earth and Heccate in the underworld).

The General, with his allusions to milk, fruits and disappearance into heaven seems to stand for the Biblical Paradise, replaced with a New Jerusalem of the spirit by the child whose birth was prophesized by a star:

Suddenly the General threw in her face a red handkerchief, light and scented. The girl looked at her father with great amazement like a man awakened from a dream, for she could no longer remember anything. She had forgotten everything he had told her. The flower in the window however could hear and see through its leaves like a red star through a cloud.

Ileana too is reborn through Virgin Mary and through alchemical gold (the stars the Virgin places on her forehead, symbolizing her restored, spiritual vision). Born of the Virgin's tear, the Prince is revealed in the tears shed by his bride. The earth answers the grace from heaven. Or, as the famous Smaragdine Table reads in the Hermetica, "As Above, So Below".

The eyes of Ileana, blinded by tears, could no longer see anything, except she thought she could see the golden tub, filled with her tears, she could see as if in a dream the visage of her beloved Prince.

The Queen too fell asleep beside him and dreamed that Virgin Mary took two stars from the Universe and placed them on her forehead. The next day, awakened, she could see...

The tub filled with tears resembles the alchemical bowl, in which the snake Uroboros, signifying the spirit, is eating its own tail. The spirit will feed on itself, not on things from nature. This alchemical paradise, of the revelation of the spirit, is poetic creation, the writing of *Prince Charming of the Tear*.

Eminescu's tale is making a demand of erudite reading, while also simulating human condition as the hell of conflict and strife and the paradise of social peace and spiritual creation.

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