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The Pragmatics Of Co-Creation: Reader, Author, And Voice In The Fictional Space

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Abstract: This paper explores the dynamic interplay between author and reader in the creation of literary meaning, framed through a pragmatic and dialogic lens. Drawing on the theories of Mey, Bakhtin, Barthes, and Ryan, it examines how writing functions as a process of seduction and co-creation, in which the reader is both guided by and actively reconstructs the author's textual world. Concepts such as immersion, interactivity, deixis, and focalization are discussed as pragmatic mechanisms that enable the reader's participation in meaning-making. Through examples from Trollope, Cortázar, Austen, and Tolstoy, the study demonstrates how voice, perspective, and linguistic cues orchestrate a multilayered dialogue between text, author, and reader. Ultimately, literary communication emerges as a social act grounded in shared consciousness and pragmatic cooperation, where texts come to life only through the reader's engaged response.

Keywords: Pragmatics; Reader-response; Co-creativity; Vocalization; Focalization; Bakhtin; Barthes; Literary discourse.

Introduction: The act of writing has long been seen not merely as a solitary pursuit but as an inherently dialogic process. The writer's words do not exist in isolation; they invite the reader into a carefully constructed fictional world and demand participation in the act of meaning-making. As Mey (1994, 2000) and Bakhtin (1994) suggest, the text is not a static object but a dynamic intersection between two consciousnesses—the author's and the reader's. In this sense, writing may be compared to a technique of seduction: the author lures the reader away from the mundane realities of daily life into a space governed by imagination and shared understanding.

The reader, however, is far from passive. Following Barthes' proclamation that "the author is dead, long live the reader" (1977), modern literary theory acknowledges the reader's indispensable role in completing the text. Ryan (2001) further refines this relationship by distinguishing between interactivity, where the reader manipulates the text, and immersion, where the reader identifies completely with it. This paper investigates how such co-creative engagement is achieved through linguistic and pragmatic means—particularly deixis, focalization, and vocalization—and how these mechanisms position the reader as both interpreter and participant in the fictional universe.

The process of writing has been likened to a technique of seduction: a writer takes the readers by the hand, separates them from the drudgery of everyday life, and introduces them to a new world of which the writer is the creator and main 'authority' (Mey, 1994: 162; 2000: 109). The readers must accept this seductive move and follow the author into the labyrinth of the latter's choice in order to participate properly in the literary exercise. The readers take the narrative relay out of the hands of the author: "The author is dead, long live the reader," to vary Barthes (1977).

Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) envisioned this reader participation along a twofold dimension: that of interactivity (in which the reader manipulates the text) and that of immersion (where the reader seamlessly identifies him- or herself with the text). In immersion mode, the reader is not a mere spectator on the virtual scene: the role of the reader is that of an "active participant in the process of creating the fictional space" (Mey, 1994: 155). As discussed later, the

immersed reader is a "voice" in the text: he or she is not only "present at the creation" of the text but also, to some extent, its "creator" (Barthes, 1977).

In literary texts in particular, the success of the story depends not only on the author but also, to a high degree, on the reader. In the process of creating the text, the reader is created anew—reborn in the text's image. This interactivity does not occur solely on the level of the text; it involves a deeper layer, that of the self. What is created is not only the fictional space but also the reader within it—lector in fabula. "This book changed my life" is therefore not just a trite expression we employ to register an exceptional reading experience; such changes happen whenever we consume texts (including nonliterary genres such as scientific and commercial prose, legal texts, etc., and "texts" in a broader sense— the theater, film, visual arts, and so on; Mey, 1994: 155). Updating our view on texts, we may even include here the virtual realities of the computerized world and its texts, as discussed by authors such as Gorayska and Mey (1996), Ryan (2001), and others.

Pragmatically speaking, a text is the result of what Bakhtin (1994: 107) called "the meeting of two subjects." The life of the text "always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects" (Bakhtin, 1994: 106), the two consciousnesses being the author's and the reader's. The author is by definition conscious of his or her role in creating the world of letters—the fictional space mentioned previously. However, the reader's consciousness is just as essential in co-creating this fictional universe. For Bakhtin, the reader is the co-creator of the text: it is in the dialogue between author and reader that the text, as a dialectical creation, emerges (see Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich).

How do author and reader—these two "consciousnesses"—navigate the fictional space? For a reader, it is not enough to identify with the author passively; the reader must consciously adopt the co-creator role, as it is assigned by the textual dialectics. Conversely, the author must consciously alert the reader to the signposts and other "indexes" placed in the fictional space to enable the navigation process.

In some older novels, mainly those written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the author often appears on the scene in person, apostrophizing the reader and telling him or her what to do, what to feel, what not to object to, which disbeliefs to willfully suspend, and so on. The nineteenth-century British writer Anthony Trollope was a master of this "persuasion-cum-connivance," as when he told his readership that he was unable to expatiate further on certain characters of his story: the publisher, Mr. Longman, would not allow him a fourth volume, so he had to finish the third and last of the Barchester novels at page 477—and, well, since "we are already at page 396" ("Oh, that Mr. Longman would allow me a fourth!" Trollope, 1857/1994: 306). The curious and eagerly co-creative reader hurries to the last page of the novel to find that its number is indeed 477, just as the author had predicted. We cannot exclude the possibility that the reader may feel a bit taken in—the co-creative is morphing into the gullible. Cases such as these are exceptions, and readers will normally do no more than smile at discovering their complicity in what is commonly understood as an authorial prank. In other cases, the co-creativity that is needed to make the enterprise succeed, although less obvious, is (perhaps for that reason) considerably more effective. Notorious instances of successful "reader deception" are found in the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar's work, as in the novella Historia con migalas ("A Story of Spiders," 1985). Here, the author consciously leads the reader down a garden path of narration, along which the two female protagonists are by default assumed to be a male-female couple. Only in the story's very last sentence do they literally remove their morphological protection, along with their seductive veils (see Mey, 1992). The trick is pulled off successfully only in the Spanish original.

In the Cortázar story, reader seduction—involving the co-creation of a manipulated consciousness—is achieved without the reader's awareness, a typical requirement of certain literary genres such as the joke or, as in this case, the garden-path story. In other (more normal) cases, readers are guided through the fictional labyrinth by certain indications as to where the narrative thread is leading them, which readerly pitfalls they have to avoid, where to proceed with caution, or alternatively, with boldness, and so on. In addition, we have means to indicate the time and place relations that are important for establishing and promoting the flow of the story. Time adverbs such as "today" and place adverbs such as "abroad" tell us when and where the story takes place. We also have sentence adverbs that give a particular flavor to a larger stretch of discourse, sometimes even an entire paragraph (e.g., "regularly,"

In addition to these linguistic techniques, pragmatics offers the reader great help. There is Gricean implicature, mentioned previously; furthermore, the author has at his or her disposal various ways of representing speech or thought, either by directly quoting a character's utterance (literally putting words in his or her mouth) or by indirectly reproducing what the character is thinking to him- or herself in free

indirect discourse, as in the following quote from Jane Austen (1810/1947: 191): "And now what had she done, or what had she omitted to do, to merit such a change?" Here, "she" (Catherine, the novel's heroine) is musing about her sudden change in fate (owing to the fact that, unbeknownst to her, the father of her lover has discovered that she is not a rich prospect after all); however, we are never told explicitly who this "she" is. Being competent, co-creative readers, we will know. Characters are given "voices" that we clearly and distinctly perceive as their own. This notion (including the phenomenon of vocalization) is discussed next.

Vocalization is a powerful way of creating and maintaining the fictional space with the willing help and indispensable assistance of the readership, and of orchestrating the dialectics of co-creativity between author and reader. Taken by itself, the term may be translated as "giving a voice" or "making vocal" (or "heard," depending on the perspective). In the context of literary pragmatics, vocalization means "giving a voice to a character in the story"—in other words, making the character speak.

We are more or less familiar with the phenomenon from the simple fact of narrative dialogue. Whenever a conversation is included in the story, we hear the voices of the characters discussing current events or other matters of interest, such as how many kinds of love there are (compare Kitty and Anna's conversation in Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, 1889/1962: 155), or the advantages of married life as opposed to the single gentleman officer's existence, as enthusiastically described by General Serpuchovskoy to Vronsky—how he got his hands freed when marriage lifted the fardeau of everyday worries onto his shoulders (Tolstoy, 1889/1962: 350). In situations such as these, the attribution of voices is straightforward, much as in a play: the lines are put into the mouths of the characters, given voice through the unique assignment of a familiar role name, and are often preceded by what is called a parenthetical, such as "he said," "she laughed," or "he cried."

Vocalization and Focalization

Vocalization is an intricate process, in as much as it not only gives voice to a character in the strict sense of speaking one's part, but also affords information about the character's perspective or point of view. What the voice indicates is not just the character as such (by naming the person) but also the viewpoint from which the character sees the other characters and the world. In this wider sense, voices range over the entire fictional space they create: "Utterances belong to their speakers (or writers) only in the least interesting, purely physiological sense; but as successful communication, they always belong to (at least) two people—the speaker and his or her listener" (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 129).

Vocalization always implies focalization—a focusing on the characters' placement in the literary universe (Mey, 2000: 148). In Bal's (1985: 100) words, focalization is "the relation between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented." This vision and these relations are not open to direct inspection by the reader's naked eye, inasmuch as they are necessarily mediated through the voice of the author; consequently, they may have trouble being focalized properly.

The Pragmatics of Voice

In the absence of obvious signposts—such as names and parentheticals attached to the "physiological utterance" (especially when we are dealing with an unspoken thought or an "unspeakable sentence")—we may be unsure whose voice we are hearing. This is where pragmatics comes to the rescue. In order to be speakable, a sentence, Banfield (1982) noted, must have a "speaking subject"—not just a sentential subject, but one authoring the utterance and placing it in a context in which certain utterances are speakable by certain persons. Successful vocalization at the author's end is matched by the reader's successful re-vocalizing: the reader co-creates the part of the fictional universe in which the utterance is spoken and attributes the voices univocally to the focalizing characters, including the speaking subject.

When Voices Clash

Voices may sound in harmony, or they may clash. A voice that is not in accordance with what we, as readers, know about the speaking character will jar—it will not sound right. We do not feel it is the voice of the character (but perhaps the voice of the intrusive narrator trying to disguise him- or herself as a character, or even, as in the case of Trollope, as the author). Other clashes are often referred to as poetic license, such as when animals are attributed vocalizations that are not in keeping with their animal status. In Anna Karenina, we encounter quoted thoughts ascribed to the bird-dog Laska, who is irritated at Levin and his brother because they keep chatting while the birds fly by, one after the other, without the hunters so much as bothering to point their guns at them: "Look how they have time to make conversation—she thought—and the birds are coming… In fact, here comes one. They're going to bungle it… Laska thought" (Tolstoy, 1889/1962: 185).

In other cases, the reader is confused, such as when voices speak "out of order," having access to material that is strictly inaccessible to the characters, given their

background—or even false (Mey, 2000: Ch. 6). Such clashes may even be caused intentionally, for example, to obtain a comic effect by letting characters adopt modes of speech not commensurate with their status or setting (such as when a director purposefully introduces modern colloquialisms and slang into a Shakespearean play).

The user has been the guideline in our reflections on the ways readers and authors participate in the common endeavor of creating a literary text. The dialogue we engage in as authors and readers is a dialogue of users; the "dialectics of dialogue" has been invoked to explain the users' co-creative roles, as authors and readers, in establishing the textual object (e.g., a story).

However, dialogue does not happen in a vacuum; it is a dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static coexistence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs, and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born. Coexistence and becoming are fused into an indissoluble, concrete multi-speeched unity. Bakhtin, 1992: 365)

The voices of the text are anchored in the plurality of discourse, in a "multi-speeched" mode; this multivocality represents the dialectic relations between different societal forces (see Discourse, Foucauldian Approach). If it is true that texts come into existence as human texts only through actual engagement by a human user (as already stated by Roman Ingarden in 1931), then a pragmatic view of text—particularly literary text—is anchored in this user engagement. Conversely, the user is engaged only insofar as he or she is able to follow and recreate the text supplied by the author. Among the voices of the text, the reader too has one; this vocalization is subject to the same societal conditions that surround the author. The textual dialogue thus presupposes a wider context than that provided by the actual text. As we have seen, pragmatics offers a view on this wider social context and explains how it interacts with author, text, and reader.

CONCLUSION

The pragmatics of literary reading reveals that meaning is not imposed unilaterally by the author but emerges from the cooperative interaction between writer and reader. As Bakhtin argued, the life of the text unfolds on the boundary between two consciousnesses, each contributing to the creation of a shared fictional world. Through the pragmatic tools of deixis, reference, and focalization, authors signal pathways for interpretation, while readers actualize these cues through immersion and co-creative response. Examples from Trollope, Cortázar, Austen, and Tolstoy show that the interplay of voices within fiction—whether harmonious or conflicting—constitutes the very essence of narrative communication. Vocalization thus serves not only to give characters speech but to structure the dialogic relations that sustain the text's reality. Ultimately, literary discourse is a social act: texts live only insofar as readers engage with them, lend them voice, and recreate them in the act of interpretation. The pragmatic perspective therefore restores to the reader a central, creative role in the ongoing dialogue that defines literature itself.

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