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Intertextuality as a Cognitive Phenomenon

Mirzayeva Aziza Shavkatovna

Bukhara State University, Doctoral Student Bukhara State Medical University, Teacher of English Language Department

Abstract: The aim of this article is to set the basis for the account of intertextuality as a cognitive phenomenon that manifests itself when individuals read a literary text. It has been analized closely at the notion of 'intertextual knowledge' and define the types of background knowledge that qualify as intertextual.

Keywords: a cognitive phenomenon, a literary text, intertextual knowledge, the linguistic and extralinguistic aspects, linguistic information, discourse.

Introduction

In general, intertextual knowledge refers to the particular type of knowledge individuals possess as a result of their engagement with literary texts. Intertextual knowledge is mainly activated while reading a literary text but it may surface in other contexts as well, when references are made to literary texts or entities. Intertextual knowledge can be divided into two broad categories, the thematic and the stylistic. Thematic intertextual knowledge can be further subdivided into topical and semantic intertextual knowledge. Topical intertextual knowledge refers to the information individuals possess concerning literary works as a whole. Readers may have stored information about specific characters, their actions and their relationship with other characters in a particular piece of work, the places mentioned in it as well as the era it was placed. For example, after reading Eco's (1983) The Name of the Rose¹ a reader may remember the main protagonists, such William of Baskerville, Adso of Melk, and Jorge de Burgos, and the fact that the tragedy takes place in an Italian monastery. This type of intertextual knowledge is associated mostly with fiction, drama or long poems. On the other hand, semantic intertextual knowledge refers to the information individuals may possess concerning shorter forms of poetry such as sonnets, odes or haikus. In this case, readers may have stored information concerning the topic of the poem, the central idea and even remember specific lexical occurrences.

Stylistic intertextual knowledge is the other broad category of intertextual knowledge. This may refer either to the schematised knowledge regarding the characteristics of a particular subgenre, like the sonnet, or to specific phrases that have acquired a formulaic nature, such as 'To be or not to be', 'Brave new world' or 'Now is the winter of our discontent'. The major characteristic of these phrases is that they originate from canonical and famous works of literature and they have become stagnated² (Plett, 1991) or lexicalized³ (Hohl Trillini and Quassdorf, 2010). At this point we can observe that intertextual knowledge comprises both extralinguistic and linguistic aspects. This is in accordance

³Hohl Trillini, R, & Quassdorf, S. (2010) "A 'Key to all quotations'? A corpus-based parameter model of intertextuality", Literary and Linguistic Computing.



¹ Eco, U. (1983) The Name of the rose (Trans W. Weaver). London Seeker & Warburg.

² Plett, H.P. (1985) 'Rhetoric'. In T.A. van Dijk (Ed.), Discourse and literature. New approaches to the analysis of literary genre. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 58-84.

with `Langacker's proposal that knowledge should be considered a continuum, a gradation with the linguistic and extralinguistic aspects seen as its extremes. It follows from this that a range of domains of mental experience may be cued up linguistically but may also offer access to extralinguistic information; for instance, information about The Odyssey may be cued up when encountering the lexical item 'Odysseus', which at the same time gives rise to linguistic information, i.e. male proper name of ancient Greek origin. Concerning its formal characteristics, intertextual knowledge is described as open-ended, private and structured. Its open-endedness results from the fact that new information is acquired all the time, as individuals are continuously engaged with literary reading. Similarly to other types of knowledge, new elements become part of an individual's inventory throughout his or her life, so the possibilities of intertextual knowledge activation are practically infinite. It is private in the sense that it contains information that may vary greatly from one individual to another. Not only have readers encountered different texts but also the memories they have from them vary greatly. Unlike general knowledge, knowledge associated with literary reading is not so easily accessible to all the members of a community. In addition, as literature itself is seen as a subject on which expertise can be sought, there are members in each community who are considered more trained readers, as a result of their formal education. It is thus expected that the intertextual knowledge of these individuals is richer than that of others who have not undertaken similar 'training'. This is related to Culler's literary competence and also to what Eco has termed 'intertextual competence'. Privacy has another aspect reflecting the personal preferences of individuals. Each person has different experiences and tastes, and therefore different textual elements will have an impact on his or her reading. The notion of privacy brings forward Langacker's distinction between localised and distributed knowledge. Localised knowledge is seen as contained in the minds of individual speakers, while the latter is understood to be distributed over a discourse community⁴ (e.g. Swales, 1990). A third feature of intertextual knowledge is the fact that it is structured, as we saw above. In general, intertextual knowledge comprises previously encountered examples of literary language, plot or themes. More specifically, readers may store information concerning the characters of a book or its plot; they may remember the theme of a poem or specific lines or even stanzas. Readers may be able to bring to mind this information very precisely or they may have vague recollections. At the same time, it should be stressed that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to draw a line separating completely the different types of knowledge. They are intricately linked and, as literary reading does not take place in a vacuum, other types such as cultural or social knowledge may surface. Individuals are embedded in a certain context, be it cultural, socio-political, educational and so on, and they also have their unique personalities, memories, and perceptive abilities. All these parameters are crucial to the way people perceive the

Conclusion. We have seen in this article, intertextuality has not had a fixed reference in the field of critical theory itself. It was proposed by Kristeva in a post-structuralist context but its use surpassed the boundaries of post-structuralism and nowadays the term has acquired a much broader scope. Critics have come to use it to discuss a variety of dimensions of textual relatedness incorporating the study of allusion and quotation. Intertextuality has thus become an umbrella term accounting for the possible ways texts include or are included in others. It follows from this that as a result of its broader scope, there is a potentially vast amount of information that people see as intertextual, including elements from everyday life, historical references, social and cultural information. However, this very broad scope gives rise to limitations and creates difficulties whenone tries to formulate a model accounting for the phenomenon. For this reason, it is necessary to exclude parts of the aforementioned information from the current account so that we can focus more closely on the literary aspects.

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world and, by extension, the way they approach literature.

⁴ Swales, J. (1990) Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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