DIVISIONS WITHIN DIVISIONS: TEXT TYPOLOGIES AND THE «LITERARY» TEXT

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ABSTRACT

The following article deals with text typology and the frequently over-general terms employed to denote a variety of text types. This discussion necessarily involves the vexed question of the division between the literary and non-literary text. The questions of «style», «register», «functions» and «fields» of discourse are discussed and the questionable advisability of neat categorisation is dealt with.

In approaching a text of any kind it is perhaps advisable, for reasons which we will discuss here, to avoid prior categorisation. The implications of this apparently innocuous sentence in the world of language and literature teaching, particularly within Universities, where whole departments are based on these divisions, are potentially problematic. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine text typologies and the over-general notions of text «function» or «field of discourse» which frequently refer to little more than categorisations by subject matter: «journalistic»; «literary»; scientific and so on and which, on closer analysis turn out to contain a mixture of styles and registers of discourse. The traditional division between the «literary» and «non-literary» text and what Leech (1968) refers to as «the lang-lit problem» is, of course, axiomatic to the debate on text typologies in general and, although it is beyond the scope of a paper of this length to provide any kind of history of this debate, it is perhaps worth examining aspects of it in order to recall the validity of the contributions made.

We shall, briefly, examine work on stylistics, linguistics and the philosophy of language in order to derive insights into the nature of the literary text. The potential field is enormous as the subject is one which embraces work from a wide variety of disciplines. The areas of overlap between these disciplines provides a fruitful topic of discussion in itself. However, we make no attempt at a comprehensive overview of the subject, but merely hope to convey the idea that any discussion on the nature of textuality, and of the literary text in particular, may usefully borrow from any number of sources.

Jakobson»s paper on «Linguistics and Poetics», delivered to a conference at Indiana University on «Style and Language» in 1960, stated that, because the main subject of poetics is the *diferentia specifica* of verbal art in relation to other arts and in relation to other kinds of verbal behaviour, poetics is entitled to the leading place in literary studies. As poetics deals with problems of verbal structure, and linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, he argued that poetics should be regarded as an integral part of linguistics. Jakobson commented that the insistence on keeping apart poetics and linguistics is warranted only when the field of linguistics is illicitly restricted, as, for example, when the scope of linguistics is confined to grammar alone or to non-semantic questions of form.

Pointing to the relevance of painting and cinema to surrealist aesthetics, Jakobson maintained that many artistic symbols belonged not merely to poetics, but to the whole theory of signs, that is to semiotics. Symbols in a dramatic text, for example, are provided by both linguistic and non-linguistic means; the stage directions are linguistic signs providing instructions for non-linguistic interpretations, such as gestures, lighting, costume and stage settings. Yet the dramatic text would traditionally have been approached as a literary text-to-be-read, rather than a text-to-be-performed whose interpretation is open to a variety of renderings depending on scenography, cultural setting and linguistic variation.

The attempt to breach the divide between literature and linguistics and solve what Leech (1968) refers to as «the lang-lit problem» established the area of studies known as «stylistics», the result of work carried out since the sixties, although rooted in a more distant past, which employes insights from the philosophy of language, linguistics to analyse the literary works of art. Carter defines the various branches of stylistics:

> Linguistic Stylistics: a form of stylistics whose practitioners attempt to derive from the study of style and language a refinement of models for the analysis of language and thus contribute to the development of linguistic theory.
>
> Literary Stylistics: a distinguishing feature of work in literary stylistics is the provision of a basis for fuller understanding, appreciation and interpretation of avowedly literary and author-centred texts.

> Affective Stylistics: is concerned both directly and indirectly with issues of interpretation in the way responses to language in literature are organised. Work in affective stylistics foregrounds the question of how different readers of the same language can make a text in that language «mean» differently. (Carter 1986:76).

Again the attempt to divide and rule is with us; «to attempt to derive from the study of style and language a refinement of models for the analysis of language../...», as opposed to literary stylistics involved in the «understanding, appreciation and interpretation of avowedly literary texts». Can these aims really be considered mutually exclusive? However, the application of linguistic techniques to «avowedly literary» texts represented a valid attempt not to discard developments in the field of linguistics which could clearly throw light on the literary text, thereby elucidating our approach to texts in general. In this context it useful to examine the developments which have taken place over the last decade or so and which have, to some extent, breached the previous rift between literary criticism and linguistics.

David Lodge comments (1988:foreword) that «literary criticism has been drawn into the vortex of a powerful new field of study», with reference to the terms and concepts drawn from linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy. This development has been claimed by some to have undermined the traditional underpinnings of literary criticism, the authority of the literary canon, the validity of empirical scholarship, the capacity for individual responses to primary texts. As Snell-Hornby points out (1988:7-9), the debate has often been emotive and the divisions are noticeable in University departments throughout the world. Post-structuralism has been seen as destructive to these traditional humanist principles. This debate is of direct relevance to the study of translation as it has obvious implications for the analysis of literary texts and also for our view of what constitutes *literary* language, what a *non-literary* text. One possible starting point is the author.

Foucault»s essay «What is an author?» (1988) comments that an author»s name is not simply an element in a discourse, assuring a classificatory function, such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. It establishes a relationship between texts of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal relations or *concomitant utilization*. It enables a work to be distinguished from ordinary speech and, in a certain culture, given a specific status. Foucault uses the term *author function* to characterise and differentiate one discourse from another. He claims that discourse in our culture was not originally *a product*, but essentially a gesture fraught with risks. Clearly, Foucault died before Rushdie revived this earlier perception of authorship.

Nevertheless, by challenging the accepted authority of the author, Foucault opened up approaches to a typology of discourse constructed not solely

from grammatical features, formal structures and objects of discourse but he also considered that, «...more likely there exist properties or relationships peculiar to discourse (not reducible to the rules of grammar and logic), and one must use these to distinguish the major categories of discourse» (196). These *properties and relationships* are related to the *author-function* in a society based on property.

According to Foucault, «the modes of circulation, valorisation, attribution and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each.» The subject of what exactly constitutes a literary text is one which has been the topic of extensive debate. Enkvist (1985:11-15) in his discussion of *interpretability*, comments on the fact that impromptu utterances and certain modern poems cannot be explicated through the accepted channels of syntax and overt intersentential linkings, a comment which is equally applicable to any work of literature, one could argue. Commenting on the concept put forward by Quirk et al. of *acceptability*, meaning the acceptability or otherwise of an utterance as decided by the judgements of informants, he points out that judgements approving or disapproving of a certain expression are inevitably affected by the situation or context in which the expression is presented and that we therefore need a third expression, *contextual acceptability*.

Enkvist»s notions of *intelligibility, comprehensibility* and *interpretability* allow us to view a text as *interpretable*, if not immediately *comprehensible*, comprehensibility requiring a «definite meaning, semantic structure» (1985:7), whereas, «a text is interpretable to those who can build around that text a scenario, a text world, a set of states of affairs in which that text makes sense.» Certain texts, he states, can go straight to pragmatic meaning, skirting normal lexis and syntax. Some people can interpret a text which remains oblique to others. Clearly, the interpretations will differ each from the other.

Enkvist (1985:16) points out that, when reading a text on nuclear physics, he can understand some things, but far less than a nuclear physicist. The same principle must apply to the literary text. In literary communication, as in any other variety, there are different readers for different purposes. Current theories of reading are therefore important as they seek to show how the reader derives meaning from he text by means of pragmatic knowledge according to his or her cultural experience, influenced by the time in which he or she is living and any number of other variables.

Clearly, the temporal setting of the text aids or detracts from comprehension and, to use Steiner»s phrase, «translation across time» (1992:479) becomes necessary. Enkvist comments on this need to anchor a text in its historical setting:

> Some, like the New Critics, pretend that literary values can be regarded as timeless and displaced from the provenance, home and age of the text, though apparently with the proviso that the text has been understood. And others find that anchoring a poem in the poet»s biography, time and place and circumstances is usually an enhancement and sometimes a necessary key to comprehension and interpretation. (1985:18).

Enkvist goes on to point out that at one extreme are texts which invite almost literal interpretation with a maximum of explicitness and a minimum of inference. In such instances «the text producer takes pains to assure maximal congruity between his world and that of the receptor.» (1985:20) At the other extreme are those texts based on suggestivity and inference, on maximal implication. It would clearly be a nonsense to attempt to categorise the literary text absolutely in the latter extreme, although the degree of complexity of the interpretability may act as an indicator. Needless to say, literary texts are as variable one from the other, as are non-literary ones. We need only compare the dialogue of a play by Pirandello with the work of a realist dramatist, such as O'Neill, in order to be presented with an entirely different type of discourse, making different demands on the spectator/reader.

Enkvist maintains (1985:23) that «literary communication is definable only in relative social terms, not in absolute linguistic or textual ones». He claims that there appear to be no overt, reliable textual characteristics distinguishing literature proper from non-literature, claiming that those distinguishing features put forward by Jakobson and others exist also in non-literary texts. There are, he states, certain texts, such as versions of the Bible, which are considered literature by some generations and not by others. Literature is, therefore, «...what a certain social group at a certain time decide to regard as literature». This view tends to complement Foucault»s notion of the text in relation to the perception of authorship as a cultural concept.

While it is undoubtedly true that sports writers use features of literary discourse and business pages of newspapers contain examples of flowery metaphors, it is perhaps in the *intentionality* of the writer [1] where the key to the distinctive literary text lies and in the relationship between reader and writer. The investigation of such areas as suspension of disbelief and reader-centred research into literature might throw light upon the subject. The nature of the interpretation of dramatic discourse, where the audience is decoding messages written-to-be-performed, filtered by the actor»s interpretation, is more complex.

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[1] The term is used here as defined by Bell (1991).

Translation studies, with its emphasis on the close analysis of texts has informed the debate on text typologies. Snell-Hornby (1988) in her work entitled *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach* attempts to bridge the gap between the traditional *literary* approach to texts on the one hand, and the overtly non-literary scientific approach on the other. She does so by attempting to employ recently developed concepts from translation theory and linguistics in the practice and analysis of literary translation. She stresses the need to approach a literary text in its situation and to view it as an integral part of its cultural background. Her insistence on the importance of background and socio-cultural setting as a pre-requisite for approaching a text and her concept of translation as a dynamic process, which proceeds from the macro-structure of the text to the micro-unit of the word, influences our analysis and approach to the «literary text».

Snell-Hornby (1988:26-31) presents as part of her *integrated approach* a text typology based on prototypes, whereby a system of relationships is established between basic text types and aspects of translation. Sharp divisions are replaced by the notion of gradual transition, proceeding from the macro to the micro level in accordance with the gestalt principle, introduced by Lakoff [2].

Reiss, on the other hand, in her study *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Übersetzungskritik (1971)*, bases her text typology on Karl Buhler»s *Organon-Modell* (Bühler 1965:28), where the three functions of language are shown to lie in *Darstellung, Ausdruck and Appell*, from which she derives corresponding «dimensions of language» and «text types».

Reiss then proposes criteria for translation according to the respective text-type; metaphor, for example, in an *informative text* need not be translated as such, but in an *expressive* text a metaphor would also be required in the target language. As Snell-Hornby points out, such prescriptive generalisations can be misleading, the majority of texts being hybrid in form, described as,

> multi-dimensional structures, with a blend of sometimes seemingly conflicting features: Shakespeare»s sonnets contain technical terminology of his day, while modern economic texts abound in lexicalised metaphor, and advertisements are characterised by the varying methods they use to present information. (1988:31)

Having established the difficulty of neat categorisation of literary texts in general, we wish, briefly, to point out the obvious implications of this for the

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[2] LAKOFF, G. (1982): *Categories and Cognitive Models*, concludes that natural categorisation requires not only a different theory of categories, but also a different world view, based on *experiential aspect*, such as mental imagery, social functions, human intentions and gestalt perception.

teaching of languages for specific purposes. For a variety of reasons, such as motivation and shared objectives, it is frequently useful to subdivide languages into specialisms: English for Lawyers/Economists and so on. It is, however, necessary to take into account, when teaching reading skills, for example, that any half-way literate writer on these subjects will have read, often widely, outside his or her discipline. This background culture is in evidence amongst journalists writing in The Economist or the Financial Times. (A recent headline in this new paper «Hostage to Catalonia» employed a play on words from an allusion to Orwell's «Homage to Catalonia»). Any attempt to categorise language strictly is an attempt to sterilise it. Attempts to feed students a diet of purely technical English will reap its own reward in lack of motivation and inability to cope in the «real world» of hybrid linguistic forms. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that students in Higher Education who need to handle specialist bibliographies in English need, for reasons of motivation, to see the relevance of the texts used in the classroom to their particular discipline. Good specialist journalism is a fruitful source of balanced materials which combine idiomatic language with subject matter relevant to the discipline.

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