

Refreshing the reader's schemata and their effects in emphasizing the subversive state of power in *The Zoo Story* written by Edward Albee

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Abstract: This article intends to apply the schema theory in the American play *The Zoo Story* written by Edward Albee. In this regard, the researcher attempts to describe world and text schemata existing in the reader's mind and then explains the way in which these schemata may be changed through the reader's ability in making new schemata and refreshing the pre-existing schemata. The researcher also tries to demonstrate that since language and linguistic rules can be expanded to other humanistic sciences like psychology, politics, anthropology and so on, schemata making and schemata deviation, as subcategories of linguistic and discourse analysis, can be used as an aid in studying the changes occurred in power relations.

Key words: *Deviation; Refreshing; Power; Schemata*

1. Introduction

One of the influential subcategories in discourse analysis which stresses on the role of the reader in the process of understanding the literary work is schema theory (Hidalgo Downing 2000). For de Beaugrade, fictionality is a relative notion that can be compared to actuality. So, studying the way the reader's mind processes the texts based on his or her presupposed world and text schemata is helpful in understanding the way he or she changes discourse in the real world. Although there may be a great deal of variation between historical narratives and fantastic literature, de Beaugrade believes that all literary works "are concerned with the pre-conditions of reality".

Miall and Kuiken (1994) attempted to incorporate schema theoretic principles in understanding of literary discourse. They combined the notions of defamiliarization and the role of the reader in text processing typical of schema theories. Another researcher Emmott focused on the role of cognitive principles in the process of making new schemata. Her argument was based on the observation that there are certain features of narrative discourse that need explanation based on cognitive principles, such as, for example, how reference is assigned by readers in cases where the relation with an antecedent is not expressed explicitly. She also pointed out that cognitive modeling is basic in construction of a fictional world. Moreover, she established a distinction between what she called general knowledge mental structures and text-specific mental structures that can be compared to Cook's world schemata and text-schemata. According to her, more attention has been

paid to the explanation of general knowledge mental structure while little exploration has been accomplished on text-specific ones, although they should be of great interest to discourse analysis.

The point is that the surveys in the schema study and analysis that some of them have been mentioned above, were first proposed by Guy Cook in 1994. He defined schema as "a mental representation of a typical instance which helps people to make sense of the world more quickly because people understand new experiences by activating relevant schemas in their mind (Jannuzi, 1997). Furthermore, he emphasized on the function of cognitive changes in literature and attempted to bring principles from formalism and stylistics in developing his schema theory. From the former, he adopts the notion of defamiliarization, which he adopted to a discourse theory, which also insisted on the role of the readers. According to him, some schemata are not mental representation built on different codes from language but are located in the language itself. From this perspective, defamiliarization can apply at three levels of text understanding, which correspond to the three levels in the hierarchy of schemata in Cook's framework: language schemata, text schemata, and world schemata.

The main concern in Cook's model is to show how deviance at the levels of language and text can lead to deviation in the world schemata, and causes reconstructing and change in schemata. He also argued that certain types of discourse, typically literary texts have the specific function of making schema challenge and schema change in the reader's mind. This is what enables it to be more challenging to establish conventions.

Cook discussed that from the point of view of the effect on the schematic knowledge of a reader, discourse can be classified into three main types:

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schema reinforcing, schema preserving, and schema disrupting that lead to schema refreshing. Schema reinforcing and preserving discourse is discourse that confirms and reinforces already existing schemata. Schema disrupting discourse destroy old schemata, and construct new ones or establishes new and construct new ones or establishes new connection between already existing schemata.

An important feature of schema refreshment is that it occurs in the interaction between levels and not at one particular level in isolation. Cook makes explicit the connection between the deviations at the text and language levels on the one hand, and the changes in the schematic representations of the world in the reader on the other.

This research intends to apply schema theory in *The Zoo Story*, a play consisting of two characters, Peter and Jerry who meet in New York's Central Park. Peter is a man sits peacefully reading in the sunlight in Central Park. He is an upper-middle class publishing executive, neat, ordered, well-to-do and conventional. There enters Jerry who is young, unkempt, undisciplined, isolated and disheartened man, a soul in torture and rebellion, desperate to have a meaningful life (Cohist 1969). He communicates so harshly that he frightens his listener. Drained of all hopes and in his passion for company, he seeks to disturb his companion. With humor and suspense slowly but relentlessly, brings his victim down as he relates a story about his visit to the zoo to other stories (www.doollee.com). He forces Peter to listen to his stories especially the story of what had happened in the zoo.

He tries to create narrative suspense by not telling the reason behind his visit to the zoo. When Peter decides to go home, Jerry begins pushing him off the bench and Peter decides to fight back for his territory (wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Zoo_Story). Unexpectedly, Jerry pulls a knife on Peter and then drops it to motivate Peter to grab it. In a sudden struggle, Jerry impales himself on the knife. Bleeding on the bench, Jerry reveals that he planned all these. Although a one Act play, it is a multi-layered play with no complicated plot or setting emphasizing the way language can be used in unexpected way to create particular purposes (Bottoms 2005, 20). It also shows that how using physical actions can fortifies linguistic influences.

2. Discussion

In this analysis, it is significant to emphasize the reader-dependency on interpretive schemata, of new schemata generated by the act of reading, of judgments of linguistic and text-structured deviations. However, it should be noted that accessing to schemata may be relative from one reader to another. It also should be reminded that differences among readers can result in new readings. Nevertheless, it sounds probable that readers with the same experience of language and world will hold true the following processes. There are similarities of response among audiences of *The*

Zoo Story because despite the immense diversity of drama as a cultural activity, all plays have certain elements in common.

Some of the similarities in readers' response are generated through people's general worldview about drama as a literary genre with particular characteristics. Drama can never become a private statement in the way a novel or a poem may be. The characters can be superhuman, gods, abstract concepts, puppets, or humans but they mostly behave in a way that can be understandable by spectators. The remoteness or nearness of character's behavior to the real life of the audience can affect their. As a matter of fact, the audiences' response depends upon a dynamic presentation of figures in action. A situation must be presented on stage since no play exists without a situation (www.Britannica.com). A play is supposed to be consisted of dialogues between characters using prose form of language. The language also can vary from theatrical and ritualistic manner to exact reproduction of real life. In the majority of plays it is necessary to establish a conventional code of place and time. In a play in which stage must closely approximate reality, the location of the action will be precisely identified, in order to confirm the illusion of reality through scenic representation. If the play is segmented into acts, the audience will expect each act change at least to some extent.

In this play, besides the above interpretive framework internalized by the audiences, they confront with Jerry who tells some stories. As the title suggests it is a story about the zoo (just mentioned and never narrated), but in between there are some other stories like *The Story of Jerry and Dog*, or some other narratives he used without giving a specific title, like the story of his landlady, his two empty picture frames, playing cards with sexual photos at one side, or even the teasing story he devised abruptly when he heard the realities of Peter's life. His stories seem to be like Chain stories just the same way as those in *The Arabian Night*, one story follows another. The world schemata exhibited by text and used by the audiences are;

3. World Schemata, Category I

- \$ S Park → (a place for entertainment, relaxation, and recreation)
- \$ S bench → (a place for sitting, and relaxation)
- \$ S zoo → (a place for entertainment, keeping animals in cages)
- \$ S dog, parakeet, cat → (kinds of domestic animals)
- \$ S story → (entertainment)
- \$ S narration → (informs, and entertains)
- \$ S newspaper → (Informs, and entertains)
- \$ S beaver board → (getting drunk, drunkard)
- Picture frames → (decorating places, memorizing persons and events)
- \$ S pornographic playing card → (entertainment, making bet, sexual desire)
- \$ S spite in someone's face → (humiliating, showing resent)

\$ S knife → (cutting instrument, killing instrument)

\$ S pushing, punching → (showing struggle)

\$ S having to daughters → (an old and conventional belief in man's sexual inability)

\$ S cage → (keeping animals, prisoning of weaker or stronger but without wisdom and non-human creatures, in brutal cases it is used for controlling mans)

\$ S poisoned hamburger → poisoning, killing

The above world schemata can somehow be categorized in two classifications of entertaining like park, zoo, stories, bench, and disturbing as cage, knife, pushing, and poisoned hamburger. Within this framework, the potential for interplay and contradiction is immense. Though, the content of each world schema may vary widely for different people, the combination of schemata leads to contradiction.

Another contradiction belongs to the general appearance and behavior of both characters that does not match with the role of murderer and victim in the last scene of the play and clearly acts against the reader's former world schemata. The reader may not consider Peter who is a man with well-to-do business, devoid of risk and challenge, belonging to middle-upper class of society, who is calm and tolerant, married and having kids as somebody who commits murder comparing to Jerry who is an anti-establishing, unconventional and rebellious man. The results of Peter's and Jerry's general manner can be shown in the following table. It helps in finding a direction out of such contradictions.

Table1: Status and manners (✓=Positive, ✗= Negative)

Status and Manners	Peter	Jerry
Polite	✓	✗
Married	✓	✗
Responsible	✓	✗
Formal	✓	✗
Neat	✓	✗
Tolerant	✓	✗
Older	✓	✗
Typical	✓	✗
Using sarcastic language	✗	✓
Reckless	✗	✓
Undisciplined	✗	✓
Talkative	✗	✓
Aggressive	✗ (just in the last scene)	✓ (he starts teasing)
Murderer	✓	✗
Avoid of risk	✗	✗

There is a general belief that the one who is controller and possesses both language and power in the form of creating purposeful narratives and possessing a physical instrument like knife, is probably the one who can attack and harms. But, here, this schema is disrupted in the manner that the

controller is subdued by the one who is under the pressure.

Focusing on the play, it is evident that the characters' relationship is that of dominant and under the domination. Jerry begins a conversation and then leads Peter's mind in the direction he prefers. He establishes his authority over Peter through telling some stories or some narratives. The reason behind the selection of such a medium can be searched in its effectiveness. Even Peter gets aware of Jerry's ability in telling stories, though he would not be informed of Jerry's intention up to the last scene.

Peter: [laughing faintly] you're full of stories, aren't you? (Albee 1958)

Here one can see that the effects of story-telling are in entertaining, distracting, suspending, and eventually stabilizing authority. The whole text can be divided into some stories and the repetition of the zoo story among all these stories is just like a refrain in a poem that repeats

In fact, there is a disruption in the text schema. As it is evident the title is *The Zoo Story* but no story of the zoo is told in the play. However, it is mentioned continuously to create suspense, and to make Peter accompany. As a result of a change in the text schema, refreshment happens in the reader's or audience's world schema, that is by not narrating the story of the zoo and just referring to it once and then, Jerry wins Peter's accompaniment. Then according to his well-designed and predetermined plan in upsetting Peter, Jerry abuses his physical power. He teases, spites in the face, and insult Peter to makes him grab the knife. Jerry's aim was to be eliminated but not in his hands as a suicide but in someone else hand as being murdered. It is not clear why he selected such an intricate plan for his death. However, he himself explains the reason behind visiting the zoo moving in a long distance instead of a very short one.

Jerry: I took the subway down to the village so I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the zoo. It's one of those things a person has to do; sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly.

In this way, the borderline between the concept of murder and suicide is blurred in the reader's or audience's mind and this world schema is refreshed. In one sense, since Jerry planned for it as he confesses, it can be called suicide. However, it cannot be called suicide because the knife was in Peter's hand and according to evidence it could be called a murder.

The power struggle is the theme that helps different schemata relate to one another. These two characters can be exemplified two contrary trends in the society; Peter can be assimilated to conformists, the ones who move in accordance to the dominant political powers of the society. Jerry, on the other hand, represents non-conformist forces that behave against the established rules and regulations of the government. According to Blommaert "power has a beauty as well as ugliness to it" (2005), it is worth

saying that both sides of power are used strategically and consciously by Jerry. By telling stories, he tries to use the fascinating and accompanying potentiality of story-telling to persuade and stimulate Peter as the controller. His means of controlling are narratives and a physical instrument he shows in the last scene. One can see a kind of inequality in power relations. As Blommaert declares "the deepest effect of power is inequality, it differentiates and selects, include and exclude". It is the matter Jerry insists on permanently, when he focused on the birds Peter keeps in cage as an amusement for his daughters, he implicitly referring to the animals in the zoo, or the way people live in the derelict suits of the apartments in the slums and unpopular districts of the city comparing to the Peter's job, life and facilities. As the representative of anti-establishment forces, he tries to offer his new discourse by "choosing from a range of options, selecting discursive forms appropriate to that particular context, and consciously plan the sequential moves, either by choosing to follow rules, or as it is more evident for the most parts flouting these rules".

Jerry disrupted the world schemata of suicide/murder. Achieving to such deviation, he uses other schemata deviations such as initiating unconventionally the conversation with a stranger abruptly without saying some expressions like *excuse me? Pardon, Can ask something please?* and so on.

[At the beginning Peter is seated on one of the benches. As the curtain rises, Peter is seated on the bench stage-right. He is reading a book. He stops reading, cleans his glasses, goes back to reading. Jerry enters.]

Jerry: I've been to the zoo. [Peter doesn't notice.] I said, I've been to the zoo, MISTER, I'VE BEN TO THE ZOO!

Peter: Hm? ... What? ... I'm sorry, were you talking to me? (Albee 1958).

Other deviations are continuous reference to a story never been told, using slang language which is humiliating in most parts, and disturbing common discursive features like turn-taking, admission, politeness.

4. Conclusion

The notion of deviation used by Cook (1994) is borrowed from the formalists' notions of deviance, foregrounding and defamiliarization. It is adapted to account for schema change in the reader as well.

In *The Zoo Story*, World schemata and text schemata are in a dynamic interaction. Though at the first glance, it seems that different world and text schemata of this play are irrelevant, they reinforce the effects of one another. Some of them belong to the text like the significant role of title and its relation to the body of the text, using sarcastic language which is humiliating, disturbing the typical discourse in the first visit with a stranger.

The text schemata deviation relies on the disruption of schemata about the act of story-telling.

As the title suggests it is a story about the Zoo and while other stories are told by Jerry, the zoo story is postponed. But the point is that Jerry's role in this play is as a story-teller who chooses, evokes, and persuades his listener to his so-called stories. In fact, Jerry's reason to tell stories is to present his power. It is clear that he tells stories to stimulate and move Peter emotionally. He uses them as a mean of power and through them gives meaning and context to some newly-established facts. Here, the power of narrative is not just as a means to engage Peter, but as the only way to change his views.

Jerry's deviation of the schemata serves the purpose of not committing suicide in the conventional sense, but to cause his death in the hands of someone else, for some unmentioned reasons. His manner in choosing his death is also deviant and peculiar for his readers or audiences since it is half between suicide and murder. As far as he chose it and developed some previously devised plans for it can be viewed as suicide. Though accidentally, since Peter stabs him with the knife; therefore, it can be called a murder. So, forming a new schema is inevitable when a death can be both murder and suicide, a controller can be subdued, and a socially upper-class and more literate person may be manipulate through language and discursive use by a lower level and less literate person.

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