

HIDALGO DOWNING, Laura. *Negation, Text Worlds, and Discourse: The Pragmatics of Fiction. Advances in Discourse Processes, vol. LXVI*. Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex. 2000. xxi + 225 pp. ISBN 1-56750-474-4 (cloth), 1-56750-475-2 (paperback).

The present volume (henceforth NTWD) presents a model of negation applied to the novel *Catch-22* (Heller 1961). This novel narrates the story of an American bombardier squadron settled on the imaginary island of Pianosa, near the Italian coast, during World War II. NTWD is in line with much recent research, in that a linguistic phenomenon which traditionally has been studied only in isolated sentences is viewed within a lengthy stretch of discourse. As a consequence of this broadening of perspective, NTWD treats negation with a depth which would not be possible otherwise, and also explains how negation is one of the major devices by which Heller depicts the peculiar fictional world of *Catch-22*, thus being a valuable contribution to stylistics.

NTWD contains an introduction, six chapters and an appendix, which displays the results of the quantitative analysis carried out on negation in *Catch-22*. CHAPTER 1 concerns some basic concepts which will play a crucial role in the model: **stylistics** as a discipline engaged in the analysis of (mainly) literary discourse by linguistic procedures; **foregrounding** as a use of linguistic devices which attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon (in terms of quality or quantity), and **defamiliarisation** as a consequence of foregrounding, which can be defined as the perception of things from a different and deeper perspective¹; **literature** as text in context, i.e. as a genre which is not basically different from others in that it can be linguistically analysed in similar ways to other text types and, contrary to what has long been assumed in structuralist linguistics, does not have a special dimension of meaning or 'poetic function'; **the reader** as an active participant who resorts to his/her previous mental schemata during the reading process and who may modify these schemata throughout the reading process; **fictional worlds** as a subtype of text worlds in Werth's (1995:78) sense of the term, that is, as conceptual domains which represent states of affairs and are delimited by deictic and referring expressions; and **ideology** as a world view according to which language is used to interpret the world and to operate on it. The final section introduces the reader to the main characteristics of the novel, especially as regards ideology: Heller presents a fictional world of omnipresent chaos and arbitrariness (which is obviously meant to be a deformed reflection of the present state of the real world, in line with much 20th-century fiction), and these salient features are skilfully conveyed by means of language; as we will see, negation plays a crucial role in this respect.

CHAPTER 2 deals with negation, including its syntactic and lexical realisations, from different perspectives: it starts with approaches from neighbouring disciplines outside linguistics (philosophy of language, logic and psychology) and continues with an overview of many linguistic works on the subject. The survey begins with the study of negative isolated words and sentences (Klima (1964), Huddleston (1984) *inter alia*) and continues with the discourse-pragmatic properties of negation and the speech acts which negative utterances can perform (Downing and Locke (1992), Quirk *et al.* (1985), Halliday (1994), Vanderveken (1991), Pagano (1994), Tottie (1991) and Jordan

(1998), among many others). Special emphasis is conferred to Givón's (1979, 1989, 1993 *inter alia*) functional-pragmatic theory of negation, which focuses on the presuppositional nature of negation: that is, negative utterances are normally used in order to deny the presupposition that the corresponding affirmative is the case.

The application of these approaches to extracts from *Catch-22* in two of the sections of this chapter leads Hidalgo Downing to observe that, in spite of their valuable contributions, the picture of negation still does not offer a full account of its effects in discourse. For instance, the shortcomings of a logical view of contradiction are shown in the analysis of a text about the educational sessions given by higher officers to soldiers, where "Under Colonel Korn's rule, the only people permitted to ask questions were those who never did" (p. 35). In these words there is no logical contradiction, but there is a discourse contradiction, in that the permission conferred by the higher authorities could never be actualised. Similarly, no account is given of how negation may have humorous effects if negative utterances clash with our previous assumptions about the world and if non-events are foregrounded instead of events.

CHAPTER 3 describes two approaches to worlds in discourse which have made it possible for Hidalgo Downing to overcome the limitations mentioned above: Paul Werth's text world theory (see Werth 1999, among other works by the same author) and M.L. Ryan's (1991a, 1991b) model of fictional worlds. I will describe both theories briefly:

— The key concept of Werth's theory is **text worlds**, which can be defined as representations of cognitive spaces which the author and the reader create in cooperation as the reading process goes along. Text worlds can be divided into subworlds, the main kinds of which are deictic alternations, propositional attitudes and epistemic subworlds. These worlds² are usually created by world-building expressions, such as spatial and temporal deictics, modality devices and direct speech within a narrative. The occurrence of world-building expressions in given sentences results in world-building propositions, which are differentiated from function-advancing propositions (i.e. those which make a narration or description move forward within a given world). Negation is considered as a subtype of epistemic subworld which "modif[ies] the world-building parameters which have already been set up" (Werth 1999: 252)³. This characterisation is in line with Givón's view of negation as presuppositional, but the two differ in the scope to which the contrast brought about by negation applies: while Givón restricts the contrast to the corresponding affirmative presupposition, Werth confronts the world-building parameters created by the negative utterance with those previously created throughout the whole process of reading (i.e. from the beginning of the reading to the point in which the negative utterance occurs).

— Ryan applies possible world theory to the analysis of conflict in fictional worlds. Her model departs from the assumption that, in fiction, the 'central' world is not the real world, but the text actual world (TAW); with respect to this TAW, there are other worlds accessible to or created by different characters. These sub-worlds are divided into three types: authentic, which are in their turn divided into beliefs, obligations and wishes; pretended, which consider insincere propositions as being true; and F-universes, which do not pretend to be authentic, such as dreams, hallucinations and fantasies. At given moments of the fiction, two (or more) of these worlds enter into conflict.

Both Werth's and Ryan's work are crucial for the development of Hidalgo Downing's analysis of the role of negation in *Catch-22*: Werth's broadening of the scope of the contrast which negation brings about is crucial for perceiving the profound implications of many negative utterances in this novel; at the same time, these negative utterances often occur at points of conflict in Ryan's sense.

CHAPTER 4 describes how schema theory can contribute to the analysis of negation and humour. Special attention is paid to two elaborate works, Schank and Abelson (1977) and Schank (1982), and to Cook's (1994) study of schemas in literary discourse. As Hidalgo Downing indicates, the notion of schema⁴ "rest[s] on the notion of expectation because schemata and frames are used to understand new experience by making predictions and hypotheses about the new situations" (p. 119). Schema theory contributes to the understanding of the active process which the reader undergoes during the reading and of how expectations are confirmed or defeated in discourse. In literary works, it is often the case that new schemata interact with well-grounded old schemata, thus producing schema refreshment. Schema theory is particularly suitable for the analysis of negation and humour, two phenomena which are closely connected (in fact, many occurrences of negation in *Catch-22* have strong humorous effects) in that both involve the defeat of an expectation. Schema theory characterises humour as schema conflict which at a first processing level produces incongruity, but at a higher level becomes meaningful. The theory is applied to a dialogue in *Catch-22* in which a doctor and a soldier are talking about the protagonist, Yossarian. At the end, Dr. Stubbs states: "That *crazy* bastard may be the only *sane* one left" (p.109, italics mine). At first, this assignation of two contradictory properties provokes puzzlement, since it disrupts the schema of how people are described, but at a later step the reader infers an opposition between two domains within Yossarian's personality: as a soldier he is crazy, since he often breaks the military rules and is not respectful towards his superiors, but as a human being he is sane, in that he is afraid of death.

CHAPTER 5 proposes a model of negation in discourse, covering syntactic and lexical realisations, in which the most important contributions of the approaches described in preceding chapters are brought together. Throughout the chapter, selected fragments of *Catch-22* are analysed according to this framework. The analysis shows how the presuppositional character of negation advocated by Givón is particularly strong in this novel, since negation often denies information which is assumed or expected from the previous co-text, or even previously stated in it; in other cases, the presupposition denied is firmly established as knowledge of the world, and therefore the reader's processing of the negative utterance results in schema refreshment. The negative utterances in *Catch-22* constantly provoke changes in successively created text worlds (in Werth's sense), and most of the times these changes create conflicts in the ways indicated by Ryan. Apart from integrating these approaches, Hidalgo Downing successfully develops them as regards the different kinds of cognitive effects which may be triggered by negative utterances in discourse. From this perspective, she distinguishes two essential types of negation:

- A) *Negation as subworld that rechannels information*. In these cases, the information denied is **expected or assumed** from previous context or from

general knowledge of the world. In this way, negation updates or rechannels previous information. This rechanneling may be of two types:

- A1) *Rechanneling of function-advancing propositions*, as when the assumption that there are orgies in Colonel Cathcart's farmhouse is denied (pp. 154-155) or when it is stated that the catch-22, an entity previously introduced in discourse, does not exist (p. 156).
- A2) *Rechanneling of world-building information*, as when the reader is first led to the assumption that parades *could* take place, and later this assumption is denied (p. 172).
- B) *Negation as subworld that blocks information*. This is the case of contradiction, in which the information denied has previously been *asserted* as true. Contradiction contributes to the rechanneling of information in the following cases:

— When one of the terms is favoured in relation to the other: for example, when Milo asserts first that the government has no business in business and in the next sentence that the business of the government is business (see p. 180); it is evident that Milo gives preference to the second statement, since an aid from the government would mean a solution to a financial problem of his.

— When the affirmative and the negative proposition are applied to different domains. For instance, the antonyms *crazy* and *sane* are recurrently used to refer to the same person in different domains. I commented earlier that Yossarian was characterised as crazy as a soldier and sane as a human being; conversely, McWatt is considered as "the craziest combat man of them all probably, because he was perfectly sane and still did not mind the war" (*Catch-22*, p. 59).

However, contradiction does not always contribute to the rechanneling of information: it may produce a communicative short-circuit. These cases, even though they are not frequent, are essential for the understanding of the novel, since they mean traps for the soldiers, in that something which seems to be within their reach is actually not so. One such trap is Colonel Korn's rule, described earlier in this review. Another, which provides the key to the story, is the catch-22 itself, whose circular logical structure, quoted here from p. 182, makes it impossible for the proposition *you can be grounded* to ever become a reality (i.e. the characters cannot leave the Pianosa world):

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| a) If you are crazy you can be grounded. | If a then b. |
| b) If you want to be grounded you have to apply. | If b then c. |
| c) If you apply you are not crazy. | If c then d(=not a) |

A more global view of the analysis of the fragments leads the reader to perceive how negation lies at the heart of the fictional world of *Catch-22*, something which, in spite of its importance, goes largely unnoticed for readers and, up to now, has not been treated in depth in monographs on *Catch-22*. Negation is evinced to be present, in one way or other, in the apparently disparate humour devices which pervade the novel. In this way, the reader becomes more aware that all these resources have cumulative effects, which result in the depicting of a peculiar fictional world. This world, governed

by arbitrariness and chaos, is created by superiors (generals and colonels) so as to manipulate subordinates more easily. Arbitrariness is achieved mainly by giving priority to appearance over reality and by manipulating facts, so as to create false knowledge-worlds in other characters. Language is also treated as an instrument often used to distort reality: especially frequent are the cases in which nominal expressions refer to non-existent entities, such as the catch-22 itself or the term "bomb pattern", which was invented by General Peckem and became popular among soldiers of lower rank (see p. 159). The criticism is centered on the military atmosphere, but obviously the implicated target is the world as a whole. There are occasional references to other walks of life, such as medicine (doctors and nurses are presented as much less rigorous and knowledgeable than they are supposed to be), justice (trials are shown to be arbitrary) and business (there are allusions to the earnings obtained by non-action instead of action, frequent in our days as a consequence of financial policies, while businessmen are portrayed, through the mess officer, as extremely unscrupulous).

Even though NTWD does not present straightforward portraits of the characters in *Catch-22*, the analysis of some of the fragments concerns the diverse ways in which subordinates react to this world: to show just some examples, Milo, the mess officer, displays great skill at behaving deceitfully, in line with the main parameters of this fictional world, and is therefore successful; at the opposite extreme, the chaplain fails to understand the unreliability of this world and gets trapped in it: he falls into a state of total insecurity (to the point of having difficulty in distinguishing the real from the unreal), from which he is released only when he sins (something which, according to our world knowledge, a religious person is to avoid by all means); and Yossarian, the protagonist, is able to perceive how deceitful and disappointing this world is and tries to escape from it, something that he manages to do at the end of the novel.

The CONCLUSIONS summarise the advantages of this integrated discourse approach, laying emphasis on the foregrounding role of negation in *Catch-22*, in terms not only of quality but also of quantity (as can be attested in the statistical analyses included in the Appendix). A consequence of this foregrounding of negation is the defamiliarising view of the world which pervades the novel.

Concerning form, the scarcity of typographical errors is remarkable. Only two issues must be noted:

- The index of contents does not reflect the fourth level of the hierarchy of sections (for example, 2.2.1.1. to 2.2.1.4, pp. 24-29, or 2.2.2.1. to 2.2.2.2., pp. 31-36).
- The internal references are occasionally vague or inaccurate. For instance, on p. 177 the reader is referred to "a relevant example in Chapter 3", and on p. 182 we are told that the catch-22 is described in the introduction, whereas its real location is Chapter 1, section 1.7.3.

To sum up, the integrated discourse approach to negation proposed in NTWD makes possible a profound and sophisticated account of the crucial role of negation in *Catch-22*. The reading of NTWD is highly recommendable for all scholars interested in pragmatics and discourse analysis, and a must for researchers engaged in negation or in stylistic studies of this novel or other novels in which humour plays a significant

role. A reading of NTWD after a previous reading of *Catch-22* provokes the wish to read the novel again (and again), now in better conditions to understand in depth the implicated meanings of the negative utterances and the cumulative effects of its apparently disparate humour resources.

NOTES

¹ The concept of defamiliarisation has their origins in the work of the Russian formalist Shklovsky (1917/1965). The concept of foregrounding can be traced back to the Prague School.

² For the sake of simplicity, all the cognitive spaces will be called 'worlds' instead of 'subworlds', independently of their level in the hierarchy.

³ For an application of Werth's text world model to a different text type (advertising), see Hidalgo Downing (2000).

⁴ I will use the word *schema* throughout the review even though, as may be seen in this chapter of NTWD, the terms *frame* and *script* have also been used in the literature for similar concepts.

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