

WERTH, PAUL, *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse*. London: Longman. 1999. 390 pp. ISBN:0-582-22914-6 (pb).

In the last decades, Text linguistics and Discourse Theories, as part of a more general trend in functional-cognitive linguistics, have brought to the foreground the need to account for contextual factors in linguistic analysis. Paul Werth's volume *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* is an outstanding example not only of how contextual factors are integrated into a theory of discourse, but also, and more importantly, of the now obvious need to incorporate these factors in a systematic way if we wish to understand how texts and discourses are structured and how they are produced and processed by interlocutors in discourse situations. More specifically, Werth proposes a model which takes as a point of departure crucial notions from cognitive linguistics, such as the notions of mental space, frame, metaphor and metonymy, and uses them as the building blocks of a theory of text and discourse. This is what Werth (1999: xi) calls "the Unified Field Theory of Linguistics", i.e., a theory of language "genuinely relating the domains of cognition and language in a practical way which respects what we know about each domain". This is the first noticeable achievement of Werth's volume, the proposal of a theory of text and discourse which integrates crucial concepts from the disciplines of text linguistics and cognitive linguistics, bringing to its maturity a process which has as notable predecessors the works of authors such as de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) and van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), among others. In this sense, on reading Werth's volume, one has the feeling that it is what any discourse-functional-cognitive linguist would have wished to write at this point in the history of linguistics, if he or she had had the author's impressive background in linguistics, ranging from logic and the philosophy of language to formal semantics, text linguistics, discourse analysis, stylistics and cognitive linguistics. And here is the second great achievement of Werth's book: it challenges traditional approaches to polemical concepts which have been touchstones for almost a century of debate in the history of the philosophy of language, that is, presupposition, reference and referential opacity, intension, modal logic and all the problems these thorny questions have posed. The merit of Werth's model is that it has the capacity to assimilate these apparently problematic notions into a unified theory of discourse, reformulating them and thus providing a context within which these phenomena not only have a natural place but one in which they acquire a richness that was absent in formal approaches. The interpretation of presupposition and reference as discourse phenomena is certainly not new; what is new is the perspective on these phenomena as parts of a more complex cognitive process which deals with information processing, incrementation and presentation and maintenance of referents within a unified model. Finally, the third achievement of Werth's volume is the extensive use of illustrative texts to exemplify the theoretical concepts that are introduced. This is the reason why Werth's model is a true discourse theory, unlike some previous models in the text linguistics tradition which have failed to provide a practical application of the theories to the analysis of natural texts. This partly accounts for the volume's user-friendliness, thus making it easier for the reader to process concepts which are sometimes extremely complex, and it also makes the reading more enjoyable. This perspective breaks a well-established prejudice, the assumption that stylistic analysis (or text analysis, to

put it in “more acceptable” words) is not serious enough to form part of a theory of linguistics proper.

Werth’s volume is the second one in the new series edited by Longman on *Textual Explorations*, which focuses on the stylistic analysis of texts and on the theoretical issues that arise in this type of linguistic analysis. Both Werth’s volume and its predecessor in the series, by Elena Semino (1997), take as a point of departure the notion of text world as a conceptual space which sender and receiver construct when interacting with texts. Interaction (both spoken and written) is thus considered as a dynamic process where meaning is constantly being negotiated. Thus, Werth (1999: 17) explains that his main argument in his volume is that “all of semantics and pragmatics operates within a set of stacked cognitive spaces, termed “mental worlds” and that “uses of language presuppose occurrence in a context of situation, and on top of that they also presuppose the existence of a conceptual domain of understanding, jointly constructed by the producer and the recipient(s).”

Werth’s volume consists of thirteen chapters, organised as a progression from more general topics to more specific ones. Thus, there is an overview of cognitive linguistics and text linguistics in chapter two and a review of possible world theories together with theories of mental models and mental spaces in chapter three. Werth uses the background of the theories discussed in these chapters in order to situate his own model in current linguistic theory. Subsequent chapters develop the text world model in depth, as a progression from more general to more specific concepts. Thus, chapters five and six introduce respectively the crucial notions of the common ground and deixis while chapters seven and eight constitute what can be defined as the core of the model, that is, the description of the text world model and its internal structure and processing. Chapters nine to twelve deal with specific topics such as accommodation, incrementation, narratology - including metaphor - and layering, from the text world perspective. Finally, chapters one and thirteen, respectively, open and close the book by introducing the reader to the model developed in the book and commenting on the contributions made to a cognitive theory of discourse.

In what follows, I address some of the issues that I feel are particularly significant in the volume. As already mentioned, Werth introduces his model by singling out the basic assumptions it shares with cognitive linguistics, namely, the rejection of the objectivist fallacy present in formal paradigms in favour of a model of language based on human experience and conceptualisation. More specifically, Werth adopts the notions of frame, prototype, and mental space as the basis for his definitions of text and discourse. Thus, the text world is defined as a conceptual scenario which represents a state of affairs, while the discourse world is “the situational context surrounding the speech event itself” (p. 83). Both text worlds and discourse worlds are mental constructs, in the sense that they constitute conceptual representations of some aspect of reality. In this process of conceptualisation, frame knowledge plays a crucial role, precisely because it collects and organises the knowledge that is abstracted from experience through conceptualisation (p. 110). More specifically, repeated situations of the same type stored in memory give rise to frames. Though Werth points out there are similarities between his model and other cognitive theories such as those developed by Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987) and Fauconnier (1985), he also observes that these models do not deal with two significant aspects of language,

namely, knowledge structures and discourse context (1999: 46). Thus, Werth argues that standard cognitive theories do not approach discourse or propose an account of how frames reflect knowledge structures. Werth proposes to bridge the gap between cognitive theories and the analysis of text in context by incorporating principles from text linguistics (1999: 46).

As a theory of discourse, Werth's model is concerned with establishing how coherence is achieved. Coherence is defined as one of the Principles of Discourse, together with Communicativeness and Co-operativeness. For a proposition to be coherent it needs to "[bear] upon the information already present (the Common Ground)" (Werth, 1999: 51) and it needs to be deictically anchored in the discourse. Finally, it is necessary that participants evoke the adequate text world in their minds. The conditions for coherence determine the nature of the text world model: for a proposition to bear upon the information present in the discourse, it is incremented into the Common Ground. This is a dynamic process which takes place constantly while reading or talking.

Text worlds are deictic spaces, that is, worlds that are delimited by a set of spatio-temporal parameters and that are peopled by entities which enter different types of relations among them. The process whereby the coordinates for a text world are established is defined as the world building process. Frame knowledge also contributes to the world building process by evoking cultural and personal information which enriches the information of the text world. World building contrasts with the function advancing component of a text world. This function determines the nature of the text type, as a narrative will be characterised by a plot advancing function, a description by a description advancing function, and so on. Werth provides extensive examples of both narrative and descriptive texts, and also of conversations, which he describes as the prototypical language event. However, one has the feeling that the model, although in theory applicable to any text type, is particularly interesting for the analysis of fictional discourse and other text types that share features with fiction, such as poetry, advertising and anecdote telling in conversation. In any case, most of the illustrative examples used by the author are taken from fictional texts.

The constant connection that is made between linguistic features such as deictic information and type of proposition, on the one hand, and text type, on the other, is an important part of the text world model and is one of the most interesting contributions of the model to the analysis of discourse. Werth's proposal is based on the distinction between two significant functions of language: the informational function and the modality function. With regard to the informational function, Werth describes it as consisting "of what is often called 'propositional meaning'" (1999:157). For Werth, propositions represent simple situations and can be of two basic cognitive types: path-expressions, "whereby an entity is connected to another" and modifications "whereby an entity is connected to a property" (1999:196).

Furthermore, Werth is concerned with the description and discussion of processes which have to do with the presentation and processing of information, such as incrementation and accommodation (these concepts are discussed throughout the book but two chapters are devoted specifically to these topics, chapter 9, on accommodation and chapter 10, on incrementation). Incrementation deals with how propositions are incorporated into the Common Ground of the discourse and how they are processed in

order to achieve text coherence. An important part of this process has to do with the establishment of anaphoric chains and reference updating in the text world, including personal, temporal and spatial deixis. Accommodation has to do with the presentation of new information in a backgrounded way, that is, by means of constituents which are not prototypically associated with the assertion component of propositions, such as, for example, embedded clauses and Noun Phrases (see Werth, 1999: 267). Consequently, accommodation is an unconventional way of presenting the foreground of the message, which is otherwise typically presented via the assertion, while the background of the proposition typically carries old information. Werth (1999: 281) defines the phenomenon of accommodation as follows:

Accommodation heuristic: Where a dependent grammatical form contains new information, take it as coherent, but secondary, information. Increment it.

The distinction between conventional assertion and accommodation —or unconventional assertion— leads to a reformulation of the phenomenon of presupposition in such a way that a presupposition as traditionally understood no longer exists as a discourse phenomenon. This means that those phenomena which were traditionally described as semantic presuppositions will either be processed as part of the background of the proposition and consequently as known information in the discourse, or, less typically, they will be processed as unconventional assertions and will carry new information. This phenomenon is particularly interesting with regard to the use of a certain type of negative utterance, which Werth calls *negative accommodation* (1999: 253); in this type of utterance, the negative does not deny a proposition which is already present in the Common Ground - the prototypical function of a negative - but introduces a new item in order to deny it.

With regard to the modality function of language, Werth's view of the phenomenon is crucial for the understanding of the text world model. Werth defines modality as the "*situating of the information with respect to the current context*" (1999: 157). As such, modality can be broken down into three main aspects: viewpoint, probability and interaction (ibid.). Viewpoint deals with deixis, and is consequently the main characteristic of a text world, which is defined as a deictic space which presents the point of view of a given speaker. Probability deals with truth and degrees of truth and is closely connected with the kind of mental representation which Werth defines as a subworld (see chapter 8). Finally, interaction "deals with relationships between participants" (1999: 157) and consequently has to do with the organisation and management of social space and aspects such as face and speech acts. This distinction between the three main systems of modality, according to Werth, accounts for the distinction between what he understands to be the text world as defined above and the discourse world. For Werth, the discourse world belongs in the modality level of interaction, since by discourse he understands the language event together with the situation where it takes place. This means that in the discourse world what is in focus is the relation between the participants in the interaction, typically, though not necessarily, face-to-face. The text world, however, belongs in the modal system of viewpoint because it constitutes the language which is in focus during the discourse situation, and it can either describe aspects of the discourse situation or, more typically, events from other places and other times. This is why deixis is crucial in the definition of the text

world boundaries and it is also the reason why the process of world-building is one of the central concepts in the model.

While deixis has to do with one aspect of world-building, namely, the setting of the spatio-temporal coordinates of a discourse situation and the establishment of the entities that people that world, world building is a much more complex process which involves the creation of different kinds of mental constructs which Werth defines as subworlds. The notion of subworld is inspired in Fauconnier's (1985) notion of mental space, and, in fact, subworlds are created by means of the prototypical expressions which create mental spaces in Fauconnier's model, such as, for example, expressions of modality and of propositional attitude, such as belief and desire. Thus, while some subworlds may be created by the participants in the discourse situation (participant-accessible subworlds), such as subworlds which create shifts in time and place coordinates, other subworlds are not participant accessible, since they are created by the minds of the characters who people the text world (character accessible subworlds). A piece of fictional discourse, for example, may be seen as a complex language event in which interaction takes place (indirectly) at the discourse level between author and reader. At the level of the text world, in the 'story' of the fictional discourse, we may find a variety characters who enter different types of relations and whose minds may project various types of mental spaces, wishes, desires, dreams, hypotheses, etc. or even other spaces inhabited by other characters. This gives rise to the layered outlook which Werth describes as characteristic of the text world model (see chapter 12).

Werth goes on to argue that the layered outlook of the text world model is one important element in a set of features which make the model an illustration of a fractal-type analysis of text in context (1999: 340). Thus, language, seen in text world terms, presents the following features which characterise fractal systems: a figure/ground division, a layered structure where the lower elements cluster into the higher ones by addition, and a rule-motivated rather than rule-governed system where departures from the rules are explained because of contextual interferences (*ibid.*). As with other themes introduced in different chapters of the book, the reader is left with the feeling that one would have liked to know more about this topic. Both the chapter on layering and the chapter on revealed reference and accommodation introduce extremely complex topics which may be points of departure for future work in this area. Unfortunately, the author's untimely death precludes the possibility of his own development of these ideas.

Werth's volume will be of interest for university students, researchers and teachers who specialise in discourse studies, pragmatics, stylistics, and the applications of cognitive linguistics to the study of discourse and text. This volume is invaluable reading for all those who are interested in exploring the way in which discourse studies and cognitive linguistics may converge in a unified theory of text and discourse.

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