SCHEMA THEORY AND READER-RESPONSE THEORY: SOLUTIONS TO CONTRADICTIONS IN THE FOREIGN LITERATURE CLASS

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It is common scholarly opinion that reading pedagogy has been revolutionized in the last twenty-five years. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of foreign literature pedagogy. Research by Schofer, Bretz, and, most recently, Bernhardt, has demonstrated problems and contradictions. Specifically, Schofer noted that introductory literature courses continue to focus on traditional analyses of texts. However, he argued that they should pay more attention to students' linguistic needs and the development of their ability to read in a foreign language (332). Bretz asserted that it is difficult for the profession to make "the transition from traditional methods of literary instruction and of reading to newer and more profitable modes of reading and teaching"(336). In 1995, Bernhardt expressed the view that we teach students in the early phrases of the curriculum, but we teach texts in our literature elasses. This difference in emphasis represents diametrically opposed attitudes within the academy: we see language courses as the place for instruction using appropriate pedagogies but literature courses as the arena for things "lofty, not pedagogical" (6).

It is precisely the goals of reading which are the heart of the problem. A decade ago, Kramsch perceived a contradiction between teaching literature as product and teaching language as process (356). A closer examination of the treatment of reading in non-literature courses is informed by schema theory, which takes as its point of departure the belief that meaning is extratextual. Schema theory asserts that incoming lexical, syntactic, semantic, cultural and historical information is processed in the context of students' pre-existing or newly acquired knowledge structures. Thus, emphasis should be placed on building students' background knowledge and on developing strategies for accessing that background.

Yet, in the literature class, the view that the comprehender creates meaning is replaced by its opposite. Significance is contained within the text and is unlocked through the analysis of its formal structures. Assisted by the professor/critic, students read in order to construct valid interpretations. In essence, reading is characterized by two conflicting goals: it is taught as a process in our language curriculum while it is the vehicle for generating a product in our literature courses.

The present study attempts to remove this contradiction in the introductory literature course. It adopts the suggestion that we decenter the literary text and develop students' reading skills. In order to accomplish this, it proposes a merger between schema theory and reader-response theory. The latter rejects the text as a product and literary analysis as interpretation. Instead, literature is the act of reading and criticism is the articulation of the reader's experience. Since this theory stresses process and locates meaning within the reader, its conceptual framework and practical application are more in harmony with the tenets of and techniques associated with schema theory.

A survey of reader-response theorists suggests that the scholarship of Stanley E. Fish contains the strongest possibilities for establishing connections. More so than other critics, his work has not only a theoretical dimension but is also supported by concrete experience in the classroom. Therefore, by linking his research to schema theory, it will be possible to sketch a model for teaching literary interpretation. This proposed system will modify one designed previously by Sandra N. Harper.

As currently defined by psycholinguists and second/foreign language researchers, reading is the intersection between the reader's and the text's schemata. Texts are composed of units of meaning united in a coherent fashion. Apprehenders of texts possess various types of knowledge which serve as the background against which incoming information and ideas are situated. L2 readers relate the new to the old by employing conceptual strategies (top-down) or surface-level operations (bottom-up). As Carrell has explained, global or conceptual strategies focus on the text's background, its organization, and its gist. Local or surface level strategies pinpoint sounds and letters, words and their lexical meaning, syntax and concrete details (333). These ways of processing occur almost simultaneously. If a fit occurs at the local level between the reader and the text, processing moves upwards to the global. If a connection can be made at the conceptual level, the reader's strategies move downwards in search of specific verification.

It is obvious from this cursory overview that the reading experience of the L2 student is one of non-stop cognitive activity. Words, phrases, and sentences trigger movement upwards and downwards in a process of constant negotiation. Moreover, it is evident that this takes place within a temporal framework, as words succeed each other on the page

and as the reader proceeds in an effort to construct a positive linguistic experience. Lastly, meaning is extratextual since readers search texts for connections with their background knowledge.

These features of L2 reading constitute the foundation upon which to build a bridge with Fish's reader-response theory. The first link can be seen in his description of the cognitive processes involved in reading. According to him, L1 readers perform a multitude of intricate mental exercises. These occur at the lexical as well as the grammatical levels. Proceeding word by word, sentence by sentence, the reader looks for clarity, develops expectations, predicts, and rereads or goes forward (71-73). Moreover, the reader copes with "progressive decertainizing", confronts "syntactical uncertainty," and projects "syntactical and/or lexical probabilities" (71-74). Further, his reader negotiates between the surface structure and the deep structure, a process in which both play an equal role (86).

The second connection is based on the notion of temporality. Reaction and comprehension emerge as the receiver takes in the first word, adding to it the second, the third, etc. The same is true of sentences and paragraphs where the initial apprehension takes place in parts. For Fish, it is this piecemeal reception that defines reading as an experience occurring "in time" (74). The last association with Fish involves the notion of extratextuality. Individual words and groups of words do not have significance in and of themselves. Fish believes strongly that utterances are not the repository of meaning (89). Rather, the consciousness of the receiver is the creator of meaning.

To summarize, both schema theory and Fish explain the cognitive activities undertaken by readers as they confront a text. These operations flow over a period of time, and the meaning which arises is the result of individual mental processes of negotiation. The most important feature of their merger is that Fish's dissection of the reading experience is a theory of literature. The union of these theories offers the possibility of teaching reading as a process at the same time engaging students in literary criticism.

A discussion of its application will center around research by Harper, who published an article in 1988 which gave coherent form to an array of techniques for teaching literature dating from the early 1970's. Her comprehensive study established a pedagogical model for developing literary analysis and interpretation. It has three stages: pre-interpretation, reading or interpretation, and post-reading or synthesis

(403). Briefly, the first level develops students' skills in preparation for reading, provides background knowledge which they can activitate as they advance, and guides the location of information necessary for critical analysis. The second stage involves the oral and written expression of their interactions with the text while the final phase promotes the summation of ideas accumulated from the previous sections.

A closer examination of this model reveals that while it attempts to promote process, it still offers a product-oriented view of literature. For example, Harper includes Kramsch in the discussion on preliterary activities, citing the idea of building appropriate schemata prior to initial contact with the text. Yet the ultimate goal of these exercises is to teach students "where to look for meanings and guide them toward discovery of the textual elements necessary for valid interpretations" (Harper 404). The purpose of building schemata is to facilitate a match between the donor (the text) and the recipient (the reader) such that readers can create extratextual meaning. However, guiding students to places in the text where meaning is located and imposing a final objective of constructing an interpretation suggests that significance is textual.

A similar contradiction appears with regard to the second stage of reading. This phase involves high levels of student input (405). The principal reason for placing emphasis on their reaction at this point is to furnish opportunities to explore with their peers and their instructor the schemata they are building. Nevertheless, this exploration is not an end in itself but rather the means to a sound interpretation. In the same breath that Carrell and schema theory are mentioned, so Harper quotes Mead who argued that our professional objective is a literary criticism "which respects the intelligent and sensitive responses of . . . the uninitiated reader and, at the same time, also attempts to produce a valid interpretation on a more sophisticated level of the work under study"(405). In essence, student reaction is only a stepping-stone for creating a lofty product. The original emphasis on the process of reading, that is, on the articulation of the students' cognitive activities, has become subservient to the production of a coherent critical analysis which is rooted in the text.

The third and final example relates to the last step in the paradigm. According to Harper, the progression of the reading activity culminates in the reconstruction of the whole. Synthesis is essential because it

cannot be achieved during the other two stages. While this seems like a logical and appropriate objective, it removes the reading experience from the domain of temporality and thrusts it into the arena of spatiality. To unite all the pieces is to bring closure which creates the impression that the text is spatial object. It also forgets the reader's constant information processing, actualized over time. In sum, this is a model which is characterized by a tension between process and product.

As a first step in revising this paradigm to Fish whose approach is similar to using a camera: "It is as if a slow-motion camera with an automatic stop action effect were recording our linguistic experiences and presenting them to us for viewing" (74). The camera starts rolling with the professor's question directed at the effect of words, rather than at their meaning. He and his students then start verbally filming their experience through devices such as the "ticker-tape method" (99). By continually directing student's attention to the impact that words, phrases, and sentences have on them, they are able to contemplate the flow and the negotiations of their reading.

This pedagogical approach is particularly well-suited to L2 reading because it is precisely the lexical, syntactic and semantic levels which challenge our students. A technique which permits filming their reading while at the same time engaging them in literary analysis is the Think Out Loud. Created by second language experts, it is an interview in which students verbalize their thoughts and reactions to the instructor as they are reading. Comparisons with Fish's approach are striking and their combination can create the foundation for revising Harper's model.

This new reader-response paradigm will be comprised of two phases: pre-reading and reading. Pre-literary activity which builds schemata should be retained as part of the model. The new model shifts to the Think Out Loud which replaces Harper's interpretation and summative phases. Thus, students begin reading in class during or after which they take notes on what they did or did not understand. Their comments range from impressions, opinions, and expressions of confusion to items semantics, text gist and literary devices.

After confronting new material and reacting to it subconsciously, Fish's slow-motion camera begins recording. Here, the first step is the instructor's initiation of a general discussion in which anything concerning the reading is relevant. As students begin to articulate their

thoughts, the instructor puts this information on the board in order to keep track of the processing. This initial uncovering of the data and how they were received is followed by deeper probing. Responding to students, the instructor isolates certain sections of the text for closer examination. Then, Fish's procedure of left to right analysis in the form of a ticker-tape machine commences. Teacher and students move across lines and through paragraphs, focusing on the impact of words and their single or collective ability to halt the reader, spur him/her on, demand review or create confusion and uncertainty. Finally, there are no summative activities. None are needed since the point is to discuss movement through a text rather than the reunion of its separate parts.

In conclusion, this restructured paradigm attempts to enhance learning in the introductory literature course by combining a linguistic theory with a literary one. The advantages are similar to ones observed by Fish: "The method, then, remains faithful to its principles; it has no point of termination; it is a process; it talks about experience and is an experience; its focus is effects and its result is an effect. In the end the only unqualified recommendation I can give it is that it works" (99).

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