TEXT AND CONTEXT: THE SITUATIONAL DIMENSION OF TEXT ANALYSIS

By

Assistant Lecturer Atheel Khaleel Farhan

Al-Mustansirriya University
College of Arts
Department of Translation

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1 A Preliminary

Every text, spoken or written, unfolds in a situation, or context of use. And just as a text is analyzed according to categories of language and discourse, so a socio-cultural situation is analyzed as a situation type according to categories of situation. A situation type is a structure of meanings, shared by its various instances.

Many scholars view the acquisition of the language by the child, or learning foreign languages by a non-native speaker merely in terms of learning the language, not in terms of learning other things as well. But, in fact, the child learns language and culture at the same time, and the dynamic inter-relationship between learning language and culture continues throughout education. Language is a major source for learning about and expressing what one must say or do in order to participate in the sociocultural situations of society.

To study this we need to investigate the connection between linguistic and situational analysis. In an attempt to define the longstanding problem, Stiener (1985: 225) writes: " the concept of situation lacks both generality and a set of descriptive concepts permitting the analysis of linguistic and situational items in such a way as to relate them explicitly".

What is needed is a general model of situation related to text. For many scholars, it is not the linguist's role to do so. Linguists analyze

texts, not situations. However, there is an apparently insuperable link between linguistic and situational analysis.

The present paper will discuss situation types and the theory of a situation and its practice. It will also contrast theory texts that form situation types with practical texts that operate instances of situation. Then it will propose a model of the structure of situation.

The distinction between a situation type and instances of that situation can easily be grasped. For example in chess game: it is not difficult to distinguish between the game of the chess and chess matches. Or, differently put, we can distinguish between the theory of a situation and its practice, that is, the occasions when it is in actual operation. Explanations of the rule of chess are kind of text. They explain theoretical situation or situation type. The verbal interaction of participants during the match is another kind. This practical text guides a situation when it is in operation. This suggests that we can analyze theory texts to find out about situations and we can then analyze practical texts to see how interaction between participants can operate a situation.

2 Situation type as interrelated socio-cultural patterning:

Situation is a poorly understood concept in linguistics, yet it derives from ethnography (Lyons, 1970: 142). Many scholars tried to offer actual analyses of situations. Malinowski is an important figure in this tradition of analysis, which regards socio-cultural situations as basic units of cultural meaning. Situations are "culture's building

blocks" (Hall, 1977:133). Recent approaches to ethnography have studied culture by analyzing situations such as family meal times, board meetings, and hospital operating rooms.

In " Coral Gardens and their Magic" (Malinowski, 1935), Malinowski tries to describe the meaning of gardening according to Trobriand cultivators. He outlines the distinctions they make with regard to land and gardens, crops, agricultural techniques, and the social and economic aspects of agriculture. So Trobriand gardening is both theory as knowledge known to members of culture, and is a practice, embodied in actual work in gardens. Malinowski's description is of gardening as situation type.

An important part of Malinowski's situational analysis of agriculture is his analysis of agricultural texts. He uses textual analysis to perform situational analysis.

Halliday (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) argues that Malinowski illustrates his account of gardening with documentary texts, and he chooses them from theory rather than from practice. He says little about the pragmatic function of speech in the context of action. Malinowski his analysis of Trobriand gardening mainly with definitions of technical terms elicited from his Trbriand informants. But " such definition texts are not merely answers elicited from informants, but are intrinsic part of the native educational process" (Malinowski, 1935:4). He encounters the objection that such texts are "merely artificial by-products of ethnographic field work" and do not fit into "the normal context of tribal life" (ibid: 50), replying that giving information to strangers and instructing children are frequent in Trobriand communities. The normal

context of his fieldwork texts is when speech has an educational function: "The most important aspects of native agricultural speech …would be found in education" (ibid: 61).

Malinowski attempts to distinguish theory from performance. He implies that theory will include types or classes, principles and values. It will also include participation in real action, the capture of the spark and the nourishment of the flame.

3   The structure of the situation

Evidence for situation type can be found by analyzing educational texts. Linguists usually find evidence for the structure of situation types or frames by analyzing the structure of theory texts. This may be "[The] difference in perspective between ethnographers and linguists" (Hymes, 1974:37).

According to Halliday (1985), the structure of the situation includes background knowledge and action knowledge; background knowledge includes classes, principles and values, whereas action knowledge includes description of circumstances, sequence of events, and choice (or decision). These factors are combined together to form a cohesive whole.

Situation types vary ranging from those requiring to those requiring symbolic action in order to form a coherent unit of meaning. "The situational frame is the smallest viable unit of a culture that can be analyzed, taught, transmitted, and handed down as a complete entity" (Hall, 1977: 129). This implies the situation type or frame is an

essential unit for the study of the learning of language and culture, both in informal social activities and in formal education.

The model of the structure of situation proposed in this paper does not depend on the specific details of situational knowledge, but on the general organization of situational knowledge. This knowledge is based on Halliday's view of situation as a semiotic construct, structured in terms of three components: field (the activity or significant of social action), tenor (the role or the relationship of participants) and the mode (the status assigned to text within the situation) (Halliday & Hasan, 1985: 12). The focus is on the overall pattern of situation, not on the role of participants or the status assigned to text.

The general model of situation outlined in this paper is illustrated by an analysis of theory text. It therefore addresses the problem of finding general categories of situation. But it also addresses the complexity of situational analysis because it uses a textual method to analyze situation.

4 Theory text and practical text

As mentioned earlier in this paper, theory text explains a situation type, whereas practical text enacts real situation. In order to relate theory to practice, a "Model Business Meeting" is going to be analyzed so that the reader can understand and participate in actual instances:

Mr. M.: I move that treasurer and the directors be instructed to refinance the mortgage.
Mr. N.: I second the motion.

President: You have heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

Several: Question.

President: All those in favour will say "aye". (They vote.)

Those opposed will say "no". (They vote.) The motion is carried.

(The Times, May 17, 2002: 34)

Field: Formal meeting about actual motion carried at a particular time and situation.

Tenor: Certain participants are engaged in discussing an item of business (the mortgage).

Mode: Spoken with visual contact.

Part of the difference can be clarified by Halliday's two meanings of field. According to Halliday, field can either mean the topic or subject matter of a text, or the socio-cultural action participants are engaged in (Halliday & Hasan, 1985: 12). "Formal meetings" are the subject matter of the parliamentary procedure text. " Formal meetings" is the socio-cultural action, which the participants in the model meeting are engaged in. The theory text discusses its subject matter as an item of business. The practical text enacts it.

The difference between theory texts and practical texts is not a difference between verbal and non-verbal action. This may be the case for bridge rules and bridge play, but it is not so for parliamentary

procedure and meetings. Nor is it a contrast between monologue and dialogue, written and spoken language, or between communication which is face- to- face and communication which is not. Many of these of these distinctions have been referred to in discussing context-dependent and context-independent discourse. For instance, bridge rules do not have to be as written texts, but also as spoken discourse as in conversation at the card table. Halliday's analysis of components of situation helps to clarify this difference. The difference lies in the field not in mode or tenor.

There are thus major differences between theory texts and practical texts. The parliamentary procedure text relates to the meeting text in that it determines the general information to interpret the meeting text. This is essentially important for a linguistic tradition concerned with the relation of situational analysis and linguistic one.

In discourse theory there has been much discussion of the notion of frame and schema (Brown & Yule, 1983:238). Generally, a frame the background information required to interpret a text. This background information may have been created by a prior discourse (ibid: 239). Obviously, the parliamentary procedure text specifies the elements of the frame for the meeting text. Or, plainly put, since the notion of frame is rather vague and can include all background knowledge relevant to this particular meeting, it specifies the general situational frame for the general situational frame for the meeting text, knowledge which is general to all meeting texts.

According to Firthian tradition this thing is important and its importance is that the difference between situation and text has been

transposed into the relation between a theory text and its practical texts. This means that the relation between situation and text can be examined by a comparison between a theory text and a practical text.

To give an example of how this works: the parliamentary procedure text states a sequence of interaction such as: motion, discussion and vote and the meeting text enacts a corresponding sequence. In conclusion, the parliamentary procedure text specifies a discourse sequence rule and the meeting text follows it with a rational and strategic action (Stubbs, 1983: 101).

The interplay between theory and practice is very noticeable in education. For example a lecture about biological theory is followed by a practical work in the laboratory; the mathematics teacher explains certain principles of algebra and then works through an algebra problem with the students. The analysis of theory-practice dimension of discourse is of great value, not only for understanding the role of language in education in the learning of language and situation, but also for our understanding of the relation between situation and text.

5 Conclusion

In order to achieve the goal of relating situational analysis, and to determine the importance of situational analysis for the linguist, a general model of situation has been described. A theory text like parliamentary procedure explains a situation and a practical text like meeting enacts and operates a situation. Textual methods can be used in order to relate situational and linguistic analysis.

The distinction between theory and practical texts follows from the concept of situation type and should be recognized by any theory of discourse. The general model of situation appears to fit within Halliday's concept of the field of situation. The applications of this approach to the role of language in education open up a wide field for the future analysis of discourse and situation, since discourse in education makes situations explicit for learners. The study of language and meaning depends on the theory of language and situation.

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