研究ノート

Discourse Type and the Three Levels of Meaning Revisited

言説の種類と三つの意味レベル再考

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言説の種類は伝統的に記述文・解説文・論述文・物語文の四種類に分類されることが多い。各々の言説はそれぞれ固有の構造を持ち使用される目的も違う。実験的なテキストの場合を除いて一種類の言説構造しか持たないテキストは存在せず、ほとんどの言説は記述文・解説文・論述文・物語文の要素が混在している。

書かれたテキストであれ話されたテキストであれ発話の意味を理解するには言語の三つの意味レベルを理解しなければならない。第一のレベルは辞書が持つ意味のレベルである。第二のレベルは発話がなされたときの文脈内での意味である。第三のレベルは発話が持つ言語行為としての意味である。この三つの意味が理解されたとき初めて言語は十全にその意味を理解されたといえる。

記述文や解説文では第一のレベルが支配的であるが、物語文では第三のレベルの意味を理解することがとりわけ重要である。以下の拙論では、物語文における第三の意味レベルについて考察する。

キーワード

Discourse Type（言説種類）　Descriptive（記述文）　Expositive（解説文）
Argumentative　（論述文）　Narrative（物語文）

1

Traditionally text type is distinguished into four types according to its structural features or the purpose for which it is written: descriptive, expositive, argumentative and narrative. Seymour Chatman says in *Coming to Terms* “It is customary to distinguish Narrative from three other text-types: Argument, Description, and Exposition” (6).

The distinctive feature of a narrative text is that it is “chrono-logic” unlike the other three text types. Chatman says:

> As has been clearly established in recent narratology, what makes Narrative unique among the text-types is its “chrono-logic,” its doubly temporal logic. Narrative entails movement through

> time not only "externally" …but also "internally" (the duration of the sequence of events that constitute the plot). The first operates in that dimension of narrative called Discourse (or *recit* or *syuzhet*), the second in that called Story (*histoire* or *fabula*). (9)
>
> Non-narrative text types do not have an internal time sequence, even though, obviously, they take time to read, view, or hear. Their underlying structures are static or atemporal — synchronic not diachronic. (9)

Narrative is different from the other three in that it has two kinds of temporal logic: an external and an internal time. An external time is the time the reader takes to finish reading or viewing the text, whereas an internal time is the time that each event supposedly takes when it happens in the story world. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in *Narrative Fiction* gives the following text as an example of non-narrative discourse:

> Roses are red
> Violets are blue
> Sugar is sweet
> And so are you. (1)

As we can see, in non-narrative discourse there is no chronologic order in propositions stated in the discourse. Red roses are always red beyond time constriction. Sugar is always sweet regardless of time.

According to Chatman:

> …unlike Narrative chrono-logic, Argumentative logic is not temporal. And unlike Description, Argument rests not on contiguity but on some intellectually stronger, usually more abstract ground such as that of consequentiality. (10)

Argument also relies on logic but unlike narrative, its logic is not temporal, and unlike description, argument rests not on contiguity but on more abstract logic, such as consequentiality. According to Chatman "Description is often considered the verbal analogue to painting or drawing" (9). He says:

> Description is sometimes thought of as a sort of casual contiguity. In the expression "describing our thoughts," for example, the implication is of a more or less random array, fantasies lying cheek-by-jowl with cognition and conceptualization. (10)

In contrast, "Exposition, on the other hand, are basically explanations …. Thus, they share with descriptions the task of rendering properties, but they do so by a more recognizably discursive logic — analysis, definition, contrast, comparison" (207). According to the *American College Dictionary*, quoted by Chatman, exposition is the "act of expounding, setting forth, or explaining." Thus in exposition the attention is more focused on making the reader understand the idea, whereas in description the attention is more on making the reader see what an item or object is like.

In practice, however, more than one feature is usually seen in a given text, and it is rather rare to

find a pure form of any text type. Since we can describe objects without understanding what they are, description is different from exposition. Since we can understand an idea without having any opinion of it, exposition is different from argument. And although it is difficult to find a narrative which contains no description, we can hardly call it a narrative if a text consists of only descriptions.

Let us now turn to the individual text types in more detail.

2

According to the *Longman Modern American English Dictionary*, description is "a piece of writing or speech that gives detail about what someone or something is like." In *Fundamentals of Good Writing*, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren define description as follows:

> DESCRIPTION…is the kind of discourse concerned with the appearance of the world. It tells what qualities a thing has, what impression it makes on our senses. It aims to suggest to the imagination the thing as it appears immediately before an observer. (195)

And the aim of the writer of description is stated as follows:

> …he [a writer] may wish to make reader see or hear something as vividly as the writer himself has seen or heard it, to make him get the feel of the thing, the quality of a direct experience. The thing in question may be a natural scene, a city street, a cat or a race horse, a person's face, the odor of a room, a piece of music. (29)

Description is a piece of writing or speech which shows what something is like. In its pure form description does not show the writer or speaker's opinion or value. Let us take a look at a typical description:

> The right hand picks up the bread and raises it to the mouth, the right hand sets the bread down on the white cloth and picks up the knife, the left hand picks up the fork, the fork sinks into the meat, the knife cuts off a piece of meat, the right hand sets down the knife on the cloth, the left hand puts the fork in the right hand, which sinks the fork into the piece of meat, which approaches the mouth, which begins to chew with movements of contraction and extension which are reflected all over the face, in the cheekbones, the eyes, the ears, while the right hand again picks up the fork and puts it in the left hand, then picks up the bread, then the knife, then the fork・・・・ (88-9)

This is a passage from "Jealousy" by Alain Robbe-Grillet. Needless to say the person described in this quotation is having a meal. The movements of the person's hands or the cutlery are described here. The writer of this passage tries to make the reader see what he is seeing, giving the details of the movements of the person who is having a meal.

A typical description consists of not opinions but facts. Description has closer affinity with facts than with opinions or evaluation.

Speaking of "what constitutes knowledge about the world" in *Speech Acts*, John R. Searle makes a distinction between two types of facts: brute facts and institutional facts. By "knowledge of brute facts," he says:

> The paradigms vary enormously — they range from "This stone is next to that stone" to "Bodies attract with a force inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them and directly proportional to the product of their mass" to "I have a pain". but they share certain common features. One might say they share the feature that the concepts which make up the knowledge are essentially physical, or, in its dualistic version, either physical or mental. The model for systematic knowledge of this kind is the natural sciences, and the basis for all knowledge of this kind is generally supposed to be simple empirical observation recording sense experiences. (50)

In other words, brute facts are unprocessed first-hand data or information directly acquired through the senses. As for institutional facts, he says:

> Any newspaper records facts of the following sorts: Mr Smith married Miss Jones; the Dodgers beat the Giants three to two in eleven innings; Green was convicted of larceny; and Congress passed the Appropriations Bill・・・・ A marriage ceremony, a baseball game, a trial, and a legislative action involve a variety of physical movements, states, and raw feels, but a specification of one of these events only in such terms is not so far a specification of it as a marriage ceremony, baseball game, a trial, or a legislative action. The physical events and raw feels only count as parts of such events given certain other conditions and against a background of certain kinds of institutions.
>
> Such facts as are recorded in my above group of statements I propose to call institutional facts. (51)

Institutional facts are the facts whose existence is made possible through social conventions. Searle says, "They [Institutional facts] are indeed facts; but their existence, unlike the existence of brute facts, presupposes the existence of certain human institutions" (51).

Using Searle's dichotomy as analogy, we can say that the description of the meal scene quoted above consists of brute facts, but if the description of the scene goes as "A person is having a meal," it follows that you describe the scene with an institutional fact.

The interesting thing is that we can give brute facts without knowing what the brute facts are about. For example, we can describe people who are playing tennis as follows:

> There are two people facing each other with a distance of about 20 meters between them. A

> rectangular net is stretched, dividing the two, from the ground up to the height of around one meter. The two persons hit a ball in turns over the net between them with a stick the top of which has a circular frame inside of which a net is stretched tight.

The two people are playing tennis. But even if we don't understand what kind of activity they are involved in, we can describe the visual data with brute facts.

3

According to the *Longman Modern American English Dictionary*, exposition is "the act of giving clear and detailed explanation, or the explanation itself." Then, what is explanation? Explanation is "what you say or write to make something easier to understand." So exposition is a piece of writing or speech which helps one to understand something.

Brooks and Warren say:

> EXPOSITION is the kind of discourse which explains or clarifies a subject. That is, as the word exposition quite literally means, it sets forth a subject. Its appeal is to the understanding. Description and narration may lead to understanding, but they lead to it by presenting the qualities and movement of their subject. Exposition, however, leads to understanding by explaining something about its subject. Argument involves understanding in that it aims to convince of the truth or desirability of something, but its aim is to convince, not merely to explain.
>
> Exposition is the most common kind of writing, for it is applicable to anything which challenges the understanding — the definition of a word, the way to a street address, the structure of a plant, the mechanism of a watch, the meaning of a historical event, the motive of an act, the significance of a philosophical system. (38)

The aim of the writer of exposition is to "explain something, to make clear to the reader some idea, to analyze a character or a situation, to define a term, to give directions. He may wish, in other words, to inform him" (29).

Let us examine an example below.

> In the traditional narrative of resolution, there is a sense of problem solving,…of a kind of ratiocinative or emotional teleology‥‥ "What will happen?" is the basic question. In the modern plot of revelation, however, the emphasis is elsewhere, the function of the discourse is not to answer that question or even to pose it‥‥It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically) but rather that a state of affairs is revealed.[1)]

In this passage, the two concepts, "the traditional narrative of resolution" and "the modern plot of

revelation," are explained. The purpose of this passage is to make the reader understand these types of plot. Unlike with description, you cannot compose a text without knowing what the subject is that you are explaining. A text does not become exposition simply by accumulating sense data. The writer or author must know what the subject is that he wants his reader or listener to understand.

4

According to Brooks and Warren:

> ARGUMENT is the kind of discourse used to make the audience (reader or listener) think or act as the arguer desires. It is sometimes said that the purpose of argument is not double, as just stated, but single — in other words, that its purpose is to lead the audience to act. In the final analysis there is justification for this view, for a way of thinking means by implication a way of acting, and acting is the fulfillment of a way of thinking. As Justice Holmes says, "Every idea is an incitement." But in practice we can distinguish between the two purposes. (125)

The writer or speaker of argument

> may wish to make the reader change his mind, his attitude, his point of view, his feelings. He may appeal to the reader's powers of logic in a perfectly objective and impersonal fashion, or he may appeal to his emotions, but in either case the intention is to work a change in him. (29)

In other words, argument is a piece of writing or speech in which the writer or speaker organizes his ideas and uses language to support his opinions or to change the attitudes of the reader or listener. We can see typical discourse of argument in election campaign leaflets or advertisements. A passage below is from a city councilor election campaign flier in Providence, Rhode Island, the United States, 2002.

> David Segal is the only candidate who really shares David Cicilline's vision for a revitalized Providence. Segal supported Cicilline in his campaign for the Democratic nomination and volunteered for him on Election Day. Meanwhile, David's Democratic opponent was so out-of-touch with his neighbors that he supported Joe Paolino!
>
> ....
>
> The two Davids see eye-to-eye on so many issues that face our neighborhood: affordable housing, safe streets, living wages, a civilian review of police misconduct, fiscal responsibility, and more. I've been doing business here for eight and a half years, and am looking forward to having them working together in City Hall to strengthen our neighborhood!

. . . .

> So vote for change on November 5th. Vote for the candidate who believes in the new vision for our city. Vote for David Segal.[2)]

Obviously the writer of this political leaflet wants to exercise his influence on the reader's values or opinions. He wants the reader to have the same opinion about the candidate as he does and to support the same candidate he supports. This type of discourse is a typical argument.

It is interesting to note that we can describe things without persuading people, and we can understand things without changing our attitudes or being persuaded, as we often say, "I understand but I don't agree." Argument is a different type of discourse from description and exposition. Roughly speaking, description has more affinity with facts, exposition is more pertinent to reason or logic, and argument is more relevant to opinions or values.

5

According to *Dictionary of Narratology* by Gerald Prince, narrative is "The recounting (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictitious EVENTS communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATEES" (58).

In order for discourse to be a narrative, it needs an event that happens, an action which is performed by somebody, a character who performs some action, and somebody who reports the event or action, whether that person is implicit or explicit.

> A hungry fox tried to reach some clusters of grapes which he saw hanging from a vine trained on a tree, but they were too high. So he went off and comforted himself by saying: "They weren't ripe anyhow."[3)]

Even in a short narrative such as the above, there are several events. A fox finds grapes. He desires them. He fails to get them. He consoles himself for his failing to get grapes. The character of this tale is a fox. And an effaced impersonal narrator reports these events. Although narrative often contains description, exposition or argument, since a narrator can recount events without them, narrative also has its own distinctive features as a text.

As I pointed out above, it is rare to find a text which takes a pure form of any single text type. A predominantly descriptive text may contain narrative elements within the text, and it is difficult to find a narrative which does not contain any description.

6

According to the theory of speech acts, when I say to my girlfriend "I have nothing to do next weekend" to my girlfriend in a telephone conversation, it does not mean that I made a factual statement. It could mean that I am suggesting that we should go out together.

Language has three levels of meaning. One is the meaning that the dictionary gives to the statement. For example, "I" is a pronoun "used as the subject of a verb when you are the person speaking." "Next" means "the soonest encountered." "Weekend" means "Saturday and Sunday (and sometimes also Friday evening), especially when considered as time when you do not work," and so on. We can call this level of meaning the lexical meaning.

The second level of the meaning is the meaning which can be specifically identified and understood in the context of the parties involved in the communication. We can call this meaning the contextual or referential meaning. "I" means in this context a Japanese man, 39 years old, named Haruki Lee, and "weekends" means June 27, 28 and 29, 2003. Following Saussure's "distinction between the linguistic system and its actual manifestations," [4] you can call the first level the level of langue and the second level the level of parole.

And the third level is the pragmatic level, an act conducted by the utterance of the statement or the speaker's intention that makes a particular statement. In this example, "I" did not make this statement to let his girlfriend know that he would have nothing to do this weekend but to ask his girlfriend for a date.

Whenever we use language consciously and unconsciously, the three levels of meaning are operating.

Here is a newspaper article from the Thursday, April 4, 2002 issue of *USA TODAY.* [5]

> Blossoms in full bloom. Spring in the capital: Visitors walk and jog among flowering cherry blossom trees, gifts from the people of Japan that surround the Tidal Basin in Washington. The Jefferson Memorial is in the background.

Regarding the first level of meaning, we can understand its meaning with the use of a dictionary. With regard to the second level of meaning, although specific visitors or cherry blossom trees are not referred to, as long as we know what each word or phrase means in this context, the specification of each word's reference is not relevant to the understanding of this article.

Why does this article mention cherry blossom trees in Washington, and why did the reporter of this article write about them? What is the intention of the reporter who wrote this article? What is the speech act of this article? This is the third level of meaning.

We all know this is a newspaper article, and we know that sometimes a newspaper reports to its readers about events typical to the season. This article does not ask, demand or persuade that we visit Washington and appreciate the cherry blossoms, although it may suggest it.

In the newspaper article excerpt quoted above, the first two levels of meaning are more important or relevant than the third one for the comprehension. As long as the reader understands the lexical and referential meanings of the text, this type of discourse is successful in communication. Usually in this type of discourse, the third level is not important because it is either too obvious or not pertinent.

7

Here is a short-story by Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants."

This is a story about an American man and woman who are waiting for a train from Barcelona to Madrid at a station somewhere in Spain. This story mostly consists of the dialogue between the man and the woman and not many events occur in this story. While waiting for the train, they have some drinks. Here is a quote from part of the story.

> The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.
>
> "They look like white elephants," she said.
>
> "I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.
>
> "No, you wouldn't have."
>
> "I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."
>
> The girl looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"
>
> "Anis del Toro. It's a drink."
>
> "Could we try it?" (212)

In the fourth line of the quotation she says, "They look like white elephants." Regarding the lexical meaning of the statement, this line has no problem. We all know what "white," "elephant," and "look like" means. With regard to the referential meaning, we know "they" refers to the hills that the man and the woman are seeing from the station in Spain where they are waiting for the train. As for "white" and "elephants," their contextual specifications are irrelevant. The specification of the shade of white or the exact description of the elephants are neither important nor possible. They are left to the readers' imagination.

What about the speech acts? Why does she say, "They look like white elephants"? Does she want to let him know the fact that the hills they are seeing from the station look like white elephants? If so, why? Is it necessary? She could have said other things, too, such as "The beer is nice and cool." Unlike a newspaper reporter, we cannot know the intention of the speaker's utterance. All we can do here is to have our own opinion or make a subjective interpretation about the speaker's intention. There is no single answer here. Depending on the interpretation of the third meaning of this statement, the reader's comprehension of the statement varies. And this is one of the difficulties or enjoyments of reading narrative discourse.

In *S/Z*, one of the epoch making studies of narrative, Roland Barthes says:

> whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions (*stroll, murder, rendezvous*), and this title embodies the sequence; the sequence exists when and because it can be given name, it unfolds as this process of naming takes place, as a title is sought or confirmed. (19)

When we read a story, what we do is not just follow the succession of events or actions, that is, we are not just following their lexical or referential meanings, but we give names to them. And as Barthes says, "this title embodies the sequence." In other words, we are following the reasons why this particular utterance, description or event is transcribed here. "What is the function of this particular event or description?" is an important question to ask in order to understand a story. In reading narrative, the third level of meaning is more dominant and more important than in reading newspaper articles or other types of discourse.

The lexical meaning and referential meaning are relatively easy to nail because it is not necessary to give titles to data. "Blossoms in full bloom" is stated because cherry blossoms in Washington are in full bloom. "Spring in the capital" is stated because spring has come in Washington D.C. We don't need to give titles to the data in order to understand these statements. But the third level of meaning is often evasive. The statement "I have nothing to do next weekend" might be making a factual statement that the person has nothing to do on the particular weekend, or it might be an illocutionary act that proposes that he and his girlfriend go on a date on the weekend. In this case we give a title "proposal" to the data "I have nothing to do next weekend." But we never fully understand the intention of the speaker who utters a statement such as "They look like white elephants." Undecidability always intervenes in our interpretation of the utterance. But, as I pointed out above, since narrative is a discourse where the efforts to understand the third level of meaning is more relevant and important, it is a good place to develop our text-reading ability.

Notes

1) Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978) 48.

2) This is an election campaign flier distributed to residents in Providence, Rhode Island, the United States of America in 2002.

3) Aesop, *Fables of Aesop*, trans. S. A. Handford (London: Penguin Group, 1964) 5.

4) Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986) 39.

5) The newspaper from which this article was quoted was lost. It was purchased by the author on the date given above in Providence, Rhode Island, the United States of America.

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