ABSTRACT
                Although current theories concerning the composing
process overlap in useful and interesting ways, a paradigm is
emerging. This article discusses two of the major assumptions of this
emerging paradigm: that there are distinct purposes for each kind of
discourse (for example, expressive, literary, persuasive, and
referential) and that the relation of speaker, audience, and subject
is basic to all types of discourse. The article then explores four
kinds of questions which should help researchers test and refine
these assumptions. The questions involve the process of composing,
published writing, writing done at different age levels, and
eliciting writing and assessing writing performance. Current
theorists referred to throughout the article are J.L. Kinneavy,
Richard Lloyd-Jones, Walker Gibson, and James Moffett. (JM)

# DISCOURSE THEORY:   IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH IN COMPOSING

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According to Warriner's English Grammar and Composition--a typical

practical stylist handbook, perhaps the one most widely used in public

schools--the chief problem in writing well is choosing language, syntax,

and organizational patterns that are consistent with the practice of

"educated people," those whose speech and writing defines "good English."

This practice, supposedly distinguished by such characteristics as correct-

ness, conciseness, and clarity, is appropriate for every situation in which

one is "writing carefully."  In all these situations--"serious articles,

'literary essays,' essay-type answers on examinations, research papers, and

formal speeches"--a writer adopts a polite, earnest persona, one that is

eager not to confuse or offend an audience that has assimilated the principles

of standard English.  By and large, the writer's chief purpose is to present

information and ideas in a clear, orderly fashion to an audience that,

so far as we can determine, has no emotional investment in either the writer

of the piece or in the subject being discussed.  In judging writing, Warriner

makes the assumption that the qualities of "good" writing remain essentially

the same, no matter what the mode or purpose of the writing (1957).

It seems pointless to attack the point of view epitomized in Warriner's

text; we can just let I. A. Richards dismiss it with his phrase "the usual

postcard's worth of crude common sense" (1936). We refer to Warriner only

because his text helps clarify, by contrast, a new set of assumptions

about discourse. It may not be accurate to speak of these assumptions as

a new paradigm; the present state of discourse theory may only be, as James

Kinneavy claims, "preparadigmatic" (1971). There is no single set of terms

and no single well-established, widely-shared body of knowledge that consti-

tutes modern discourse theory. But we may at least speak of an _emerging_

_paradigm_ since different scholars are exploring theories that overlap in

interesting and useful ways. In the remainder of this article, we shall

discuss two of the major assumptions of this emerging paradigm and then

suggest four different kinds of questions that should help researchers

test and refine these assumptions.

### Assumptions in Current Discourse Theory

_Assumption I:_ Purpose in Discourse: Typically, practical stylist

handbooks pay a great deal of attention to the modes of discourse--narra-

tion, description, exposition, and argumentation--but say relatively little

about the purposes of discourse. These texts do refer to the purposes of

individual sentences--asking questions, making statements, etc. And their

discussions of analysis and argumentation do imply persuasive or informa-

tive purposes. But these texts do not discuss other purposes such as

expression, nor do they explain how different rhetorical purposes might

influence one's choice of diction, syntax, or mode.

Recent discourse theory, by contrast, gives a great deal of attention

to purpose in discourse. Kinneavy (1971) goes so far as to claim that

"purpose in discourse is all important. The aim of discourse determines

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everything else in the process of discourse." (p.48) This interest in purpose does not suggest that modes of discourse are unimportant. But Kinneavy does argue that the modes are important only as the means by which one attempts to accomplish a given purpose. Skill in narration, exposition, or description is of little use unless that skill serves some larger rhetorical purpose. Consequently, Kinneavy asserts, "both a theory of language and a theory of discourse...should be crowned with a viable framework of the uses [or purposes] of language" (1971, p. 38).

Scholars disagree as to how we might categorize these purposes. James Britton describes three major purposes of discourse--expressive, transactive, and poetic. Kinneavy identifies four purposes--expressive, literary, persuasive, and referential. Since Britton's theory appears later in this volume, we shall concern ourselves chiefly with Kinneavy's work.

According to Kinneavy, the aim of reference discourse (which includes scientific, exploratory, and informative discourse) is to "designate or reproduce reality"(1971, p.39). This discourse type is characterized by such qualities as concern for factuality, comprehensiveness, and careful use of inductive and deductive reasoning. Its chief focus is on the subject at hand. By contrast, persuasive discourse focuses on the audience; the aim is not to designate reality but to induce some practical choice or to prompt an action (physical, intellectual, or emotional). Expressive discourse aims to articulate the writer's "intuitions and emotions." Unlike persuasive discourse, expression makes little effort to bring about change in the audience. The primary goal of literary discourse is neither

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to discover truth nor to induce change nor display the writer's own atti-

tudes and ideas. The purpose of this type of discourse is to create

language structures "worthy of contemplation in their own right."

For Kinneavy, attempts to accomplish these four different purposes

entail different thinking processes and result in pieces of discourse

that have distinctive stylistic features and organizational patterns.

Consequently, as both Kinneavy and Richard Lloyd-Jones (in press) suggest,

it may be that skill in accomplishing one rhetorical purpose does not

necessarily imply skill in accomplishing some other; "the writer of a

good technical report may not be able to produce a good persuasive letter

to a city council" (Lloyd-Jones).

Assumption II: <u>Speaker</u>, <u>Subject</u>, and <u>Audience</u>. As was the case with

purpose, the relation of speaker, audience, and subject receives little

direct attention in practical stylist handbooks. Occasionally, these

texts offer advice that might help one avoid appearing "foolish" or illogi-

cal, and Warriner in particular cautions against losing the "respect" of

one's audience. But these texts seem almost a-rhetorical. One makes de-

cisions about diction or syntax on the basis of certain principles that--at

best--are useful for developing only one kind of persona and appealing to only

one kind of audience. Writers of texts such as Warriner's acknowledge that

one's language must be appropriate to the "occasion" for which one is speak-

ing or writing. They assume, however, that knowledge of the conventions of

"standard" English will, in Warriner's words, let a student "easily find the

answer to almost any language problem he is likely to encounter" (iv). They

never suggest that one may have the problem of choosing between two equally

"correct" words or syntactic patterns.

Current theorists, however, assume that one's choices must be guided by a complex awareness of speaker, audience, and subject, not by a single set of conventions. Writers such as Walker Gibson, (1969) James Moffett, (1968) and Kinneavy refer to Aristotle's notion that effective persuasion requires one to establish a plausible ethos, create a desired attitude in audience, and demonstrate the truth, "real or apparent," of the arguments one is advancing. Gibson, Moffett, and Kinneavy, however, go well beyond this point of view. For these writers the relation of speaker, audience and subject is not only important in persuasion but is basic to all types of discourse. Moreover, Kinneavy and Moffett clearly agree with Gibson's claim that speaker, audience, and subject exist in "a constantly shifting interplay of relationships. Argument and audience affect voice, and the total impact of any communication is surely more or less an amalgam of all three" (xi).

Moffett and Gibson have tried to describe the different forms these communication relationships might take. Both writers assume that shifts in the relation of speaker and audience are a matter of "distance" between speaker and audience. Gibson sets up a continuum of speaker-audience relationships ranging from "intimate" to "formal." Rather than attempting to describe stages or discrete points along that continuum, Gibson simply talks about the relative intimacy/formality of the speaker-audience re-lationship in specific pieces of discourse. He does not define "intimate" and "formal" except to identify some of the characteristics of the "writer-style" language of the formal speaker-audience relations and the "talker-

style" language of the informal relation. Gibson suggests, almost in passing, that "the metaphor of physical space," (p.53) i.e., the literal distance between speaker and audience, helps account for the relative intimacy formality of a speaker-audience relation. This notion of physical distance, combined with distance in time, is much more fully elaborated in Moffett's theory. Moffett describes a continuum that begins with interior monologue, in which speaker and audience are identical, and moves to dialogue, in which speaker and audience are separate but still close in time and space. At subsequent points on Moffett's continuum (see Teaching the Universe of Discourse for a complete description), speaker and audience are more and more remote; one speaks and writes for an increasingly large audience, one that is not present and cannot provide any immediate response to one's message.

When he describes shifts in the relationship of speaker and subject, Gibson talks about changes in attitude--ranging from "honorific" to pejorative--toward a subject. As with his discussion of intimate and formal speaker-audience relationships, Gibson does not try to designate specific stages along the honorific-pejorative continuum. Moffett, however, identifies several stages along the continuum he describes. At one extreme, one talks about "what is happening," recording unselectively the phenomena that occur at the moment one speaks or writes. As one moves along Moffett's continuum, one writes about subjects that are increasingly remote in time and space; that is, one abstracts from previous experience and reports about "what happened." Then one generalizes about recurrent phenomena, about "what happens." And finally one theorizes about "what will or might

happen." As a result of extensive research on the writing of school-age
children and adolescents in England, Britton (1971) has elaborated Moffett's
four-stage speaker-subject continuum into seven stages: record, report,
generalized narrative or descriptive information, analogic (low level
of generalization), analogic, speculative, and tautalogic.

In suggesting the diverse speaker-audience-subject relationships
one may find in written discourse, Gibson does not refer to any theoretical
framework. Moffett, by contrast, shows how changes in the speaker-subject-
audience relationships parallel changes in people's intellectual development,
a movement from egocentered to decentered functioning. Egocentric discourse,
Moffett says, is characterized by a speaker talking to himself/herself or
an immediate audience--a friend, say--about phenomena that presently exist.
As one becomes more decentered, one is able to address remote audiences
about subjects that are not part of one's present, first-hand experience.
Moffett specifically denies that any one speaker-audience-subject relation-
ship is more important than any other. His interest is not solely in
preparing students to write highly decentered discourse but in enabling
students to move easily along the egocentered-decentered continuum and to
know where they are at any one point along the continuum.

## Questioning Basic Assumptions

Recent discourse theory is rich with possibilities for basic research.
In the next few pages, we shall suggest only a few possibilities, deriving
our questions from our brief discussion of the purposes of discourse and
of relationships between speaker, subjects, and audience. Obviously our
suggestions cannot be exhaustive or definitive. Almost every page in, say,

Kinneavy's A Theory of Discourse or in Britton's articles on discourse
theory (this volume: also 1971 and 1975) will help researchers raise
additional questions.

## Questions about the Process of Composing

How do writers actually go about choosing diction, syntactic
and organizational patterns, and content? Kinneavy claims that
one's purpose--informing, persuading, expressing, or manipu-
lating language for its own sake--guides these choices. Moffett
and Gibson contend that these choices are determined by one's
sense of the relation of speaker, audience, and subject. Is
either of these two claims borne out by the actual practice
of writers engaged in drafting or revising? Does either premise
account adequately for the choices writers make? Do the two
assumptions together provide an adequate account? Could either
or both of these assumptions be modified so as to produce a more
satisfactory description of the composing process? Or do writers
make choices that cannot be explained by a consideration of purpose
or of speaker-audience-subject relationships?

Are there important differences between the practice of
extremely skillful writers and less competent writers? Are there
factors (e.g., previous experience in writing) that influence
the bases one uses for making choices? Do these bases change as
one moves through the stages of the composing process? That is,
might there be points at which, say, considerations of purpose are
more important than considerations of persona or audience?

The work of Donald Graves(1975), Janet Emig (1971), and others (see Walter Petty's article in this volume) persuades us that the process of composing is a very promising area for research. Compelling as they are, the theories of Moffett, Gibson, and Kinneavy are based largely on an analysis of written products. If we are to use this theory in researching the composing process, it seems essential that theory be informed by analysis of this process. Admittedly, data for this sort of analysis will be hard to obtain. A recent study by Cooper and Odell (1976) supports Janet Emig's claim (1971) that even highly competent professional writers have difficulty articulating the basis on which they make decisions about what they say and how they say it. As one of the professional writers in the Cooper and Odell study remarked, these processes become so automatic that one is scarcely aware of them. Moreover, as Emig points out, writers' accounts of the composing process are likely to focus on the writers' feelings or on the context in which the writing took place rather than on the decisions and choices involved in the act of composing. To try to avoid this problem, Cooper and Odell made changes in writers' work and then asked them whether they could accept these changes. This procedure enabled writers to provide a great deal of information about why they had made certain decisions in their original drafts. Studies of the revision process (see articles by Murray and Della-Piana in this volume) may suggest another way to explore the process of composing. As we examine successive drafts of a manuscript, we should be able to identify points at which a writer has made revisions and ask such questions as: Are there distinct patterns in their revisions? Do these revisions suggest a sharply

increased sense of purpose or speaker-audience-subject relations? If we

were to ask writers to explain their revisions, what sorts of reasons

would they use to justify their choices? Would these reasons be consistent

with the theory of Kinneavy, Moffett, and Gibson?

At first glance, the design problems for studies of the actual psycho-

linguistic process of composing a piece of writing seem nearly insurmountable.

The cognitive processes of composing are complex and not directly observable.

Consequently, we must study them in ways that generate data from which we

can make strong inferences about the processes. How can we design such

studies? Besides the procedures in the Cooper and Odell study, Emig's

"composing aloud" (1971), and the procedures for studying revision in

the Della-Piana and Murray article in this volume, what can we recommend?

We can look carefully again at the designs cognitive psychologists have

used to study such concepts as traces, ideas, associations, schemata,

structures, clusters, habit-family hierarchics, response-strengths, strategies,

subsidiary and focal awareness, transformations, covert trial and error,

primary and secondary process thinking, and executive routines. In a study

of the structure and functions of fantasy Klinger (1971) even makes use

of behaviorist notions of operant and respondent activity to distinguish

fantasy from other cognitive activity and to explain the sequential seg-

ments in the structure of a fantasy. As to particular methodology, Emig

(1971) has recommended using time-lapse photography or an electric pen

to record the unfolding of a written piece. More satisfactory than either

of those, we believe, would be to videotape separately the transcription

and the writer as a piece is being written. From above the writer and at

a slight angle, one camera could be focused on the writing paper which would be affixed to one spot on a writing table. From the side, another camera would be focused on the writer. The researcher would then study the parallel videotapes and the completed piece of writing. What might we learn if we ask a writer, experienced and comfortable with this writing situation, to write several pieces each of expression, persuasion, and explanation? Using Emig's (1971) characterization of the composing process as a guide, would we be able to observe differences in the process of composing for different purposes or in different modes? A subject might even be willing to make certain kinds of diary entries in this experimental situation or write certain personal letters.

The procedures we are recommending assume that the composing process can only be studied as a process we observe unfolding in time. There remains the possibility, however, that we can learn some things about the process of composing merely by studying written products (Odell, Lee and Charles R. Cooper, "Written Products and the Writing Process" Xerographic copy, 33 pp. State University of New York at Buffalo, 1977).

### Questions about Published Writing

What is the most comprehensive yet manageable way to categorize the aims of published pieces of writing? Do we need to have an entirely separate category for literary or poetic (we assume the terms are roughly synonymous) discourse? Is poetic discourse something qualitatively different from, say, persuasive discourse? Would it be possible (theoretically and practically) to talk about the literary qualities of a piece of expressive, explanatory, or persuasive discourse? Or as Britton (1971) has suggested, should we

classify literary or poetic discourse as primarily expressive, explana-.

tory, or persuasive?  If we choose Britton's approach, how do we

classify for research purposes novels or long stories which are a

mixture of expressive, exp˥   ᵒ˞ʷ  ˞ persuasive?

Another way to ˥          ᵅstion here is to ask whethe˞

readers could be tɾₐᵢₙ      , say, Kinneavy's description o.

discourse types to distinguish between pieces of discourse.  What

problems might readers have in categorizing pieces of published

writing according to their purpose? 'Would these problems lead us

to refine Kinneavy's categories?  Would these categories lead us to

ignore distinctions that we felt were important?  For example: would

we be forced to lump together under expression pieces of writing

that intuition tells us are quite dissimilar?

What is the most satisfactory way to categorize the different

speaker-audience-subject relationships apparent in published writing?

Suppose one were to ask readers to arrange a large number of published '

writings along the continua (intimate/formal; honorific/pejorative)

described by Gibson.  Would readers be able to use Gibson's continua

to make reliable judgments?  Would there be pieces readers could

not locate on either of these continua?  Would it be possible to

modify Gibson's continua so as to account for all these pieces of

writing?  Or would it be necessary to devise new continua?

Suppose readers were able to categorize published writings

according to their purpose or speaker-subject-audience relationship.

Would writings in one category display patterns of word choice,

syntactic choice, or thought processes that were substantially

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different from those patterns found in writings in either categories?
What analytic procedures would be most satisfactory for identifying
specific features of word choice, syntax or thought processes?  For
example:  would a relatively simple procedure such as type-token
ration allow one to distinguish bet    word choice in expressive
discourse and word choice in persu..  ve, literary or reference
discourse?

In raising these questions about written products, we have in mind
studies by Francis Christensen (1967), Richard Meade and W. Geiger Ellis
(1971), and Richard Braddock (1974).  All of these researchers found that
analysis of published writing tended to discredit or weaken some of the
claims made in practical stylist textbooks.  For example:  Warriner's text
asserts that there are seven common methods of developing a paragraph.  But
when Meade and Ellis tried to identify these methods in published writing,
they found that fifty-six percent of the 168 paragraphs they examined from
current sources did not follow any of the patterns recommended in Warriner
and that the remaining forty-four percent followed only two of the seven
recommended methods of development.

The research of Meade and Ellis and others argues for a healthy
skepticism that is not directed solely at practical stylist rhetoric.
Researchers must test all claims and assumptions about discourse by trying
to apply them to a large number of actual pieces of published writing.

#### Questions about Writing Done at Different Age Levels

Are there holistic features (i.e., what Lloyd-Jones calls primary
traits) that appear to be characteristic of, say, the expressive

writing of seventeen year olds and that rarely or never appear in
the expressive writing of nine year olds?  If so, exactly what are
those traits?  Do they seem inextricably related to a writer's in-
tellectual development or does it seem that they may be taught to
writers of almost any age?  Are there atomistic features (e.g.,
qualities of s'     and intellectual processes) that seem charac-
teristic o:         .sive writing done by seventeen year olds
but not of the expressive writing done by nine or thirteen year
olds?  For example:  we assume that writers at all ages make use
of certain basic intellectual processes (contrast and classification,
for instance).  Yet we have some basis for thinking that highly
competent writers use these processes in ways that differ from
the practice of less sophisticated writers (Odell and Cooper, 1977).
Consequently, we wonder:  when trying to accomplish a given rhetorical
purpose, do older writers differ substantially from younger writers
in their use of certain basic intellectual processes?

Are there ages at which writers do not vary their writing
according to their rhetorical purpose?  For example:  If nine year olds
were asked to do several expressive writing tasks and several per-
suasive writing tasks, could trained raters reliably distinguish
between the nine year olds' persuasive and expressive writings?
Could one find significant differences between specific features
of nine year olds' persuasive writing and nine year olds' expres-
sive writing?  Would one be able to identify greater differences
between the expressive and persuasive writing of thirteen year
old writers?  Do writers at different age levels have more success

with one type of discourse than with others? Could it be, for
example, that nine year olds seem to have greatest success with
persuasive writing, whereas seventeen year olds seem to have their
greatest success with explanatory or persuasive writing?

At a given age level, and within a given type of discourse,
do chan⸺⸺ : speaker-audience-sub⸺ ⸺ relationship result
i⸺ ⸺⸺es ⸺ ⸺ne holistic features of one's writing? Do changes
in this relationship result in changes in diction, syntax, or
thought processes? Are these changes likely to be more pronouced
at one age level than at others? For example: when nine year olds
attempt to do persuasive writing, are they as sensitive to the de-
mands of a specific speaker-subject-audience relationship as are
thirteen year olds? What features of word choice or syntax would
most accurately reflect this sensitivity? ⸺ different discourse
types increase the choices that writers (⸺ 1 ages and at specific
age levels) will be sensitive to the deman⸺ a specific rhetorical
context? That is, are writers more likely ⸺o be sensitive to the
demands of a given speaker-subject-audience relationship when they
are writing persuasively than when they are writing expressively?

We have raised these questions about writing performance at
different age levels because the work of Kellogg Hunt (in press; 1965) and
our own experience persuade us that writing performance differs greatly
according to age level. Conceivably, a theory that is borne out by analysis
of writing done at one age level might not be borne out by writing
done at some other age level. Such a

theory would seem, at best, extremely limited and in need of substantial modification.

## Questions about Eliciting and Assessing Writing Performance

Should researchers accept Lloyd-Jones' claim that one's skill with one sort of discourse (persuasion, for example) might be significantly different from one's skill with other types of discourse? Suppose a res... ...er were to identify writers who were recognized as competent in one discourse type and asked those writers to perform writing tasks in a different discourse type. How would their writing differ from that of writers who were supposed to excell in the second discourse type? Would the writing of public school st... ent... r...flect Lloyd-Jones' assumption? Suppose a researcher were to give wr...ing tasks in three discourse types to a number of students. Would ... ...nd that students who were rated superior in one discourse type were ...ver (rarely? occasionally?) rated superior in other discours...t...s?

...hould researchers frame a writing task so as to obtain the best ... ...ible work from students? Must researchers, as Sanders and Little fie... ...75) claim, provide a full rhetorical context (that is, informat... ...t speaker, subject, audie...e, and purpose)? Is there any asp... ...t of ...he rhetorical context tha... we need not include in a writing task? Wou...d an assignment that, for example, specified speaker, subject, ...i audience but not purpose elicit writing that differed signi... ...tly from writing prompted by an assignment that specified a full ...torical context?

Should we accept Lloyd-Jones' notion that a given piece of
discourse should be judged only by criteria that are appropriate
to the specific purpose for which the piece was written? (Sanders
and Littlefield accepted this point of view, but results of their
study provided no support for it.) Are there generic criteria for
each discourse type? Can we identify norms for, say, persuasive
writing that will let us make a fair, informative assessment of
quite different pieces of persuasive discourse? Or must we do
as Lloyd-Jones did and devise separate scoring guides for each
individual writing task?

In all of these questions, we have been concerned with achieving
assessment procedures that are valid, useful to students, and reasonably
practical for researchers and teachers. Lloyd-Jones reports that devising
an adequate scoring guide for a single task in the National Assessment
writing sample could take eighty hours or more. This sort of investment
in time and effort is out of the question for most teachers and many re-
searchers. It seems important to find out whether we can make compromises
that will let us have a valid but practicable means of assigning writing
and assessing writing ability.

This attempt to make compromises leads one back to basic theoretical
issues. Suppose researchers were to find that, for example, explicit
statements about purpose could be omitted from writing assignments without
affecting writers' performance on those assignments. If this were the
case, one would have to consider the possibility that, at least under

some circumstances, purpose in writing might not be as important as Kinneavy
(and we) think it is.

## A Final Consideration

Throughout this article, we have made a number of references to
specific questions researchers might pursue.  We would be delighted if
these questions lead to new understanding of written products or the
composing process.  Yet we assume that questions and under_____ __ al_
will be subject to continual revision; an exhaustive description of writing
performance will mean only that we have exhausted our own resources for
asking and answering questions, not that we have exhausted the complexities
of our subject.  Consequently, we share an attitude Moffett has expressed
about a segment of Teaching the Universe of Discourse:  "The theory of
discourse that makes up most of this chapter is meant to be utilized,
not believed.  I am after a strategic gain in concept" (p.15).  We antici-
pate that the process of answering existing questions or seeking support
for existing assumptions will lead to new information and new assumptions.
Consequently, we are interested not only in gaining information but also
in refining our ability to gain information, learning how to ask further
questions, and doing what we can to insure that we and other researchers
continue to make strategic gains in concept.

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