



A text world theory approach to the teaching of short stories in an EFL context: A pedagogical stylistic study

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Abstract

The present study attempts to examine how the stylistic aspects of Text World Theory (TWT) can be used in Literature and Language Teaching classrooms in order to help students to improve their critical understanding and interpretation. The pedagogical stylistic application of this theory can enhance ELT students' language awareness, creative reading skills as well as reader-response skills and deepen the interaction between readers and texts. The study focuses initially on the efficacy of the use of short stories for Literature and Language Teaching courses and, then, adapts a sample short story entitled *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida according to the three layers of the Text World Theory which are "discourse world", "text world", and "sub-world". The researcher then offers students pedagogical stylistic applications through a) what are the building blocks of the story which can be identified by the Text World Theory? and b) How do these building blocks enable students to make connections with the text? This latter will help them establish a link between the worlds of the main characters and their own. The results of the focus group interview revealed that using this theory in EFL context enhanced language awareness, creative reading skills and reader-response skills in students.

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Keywords: Pedagogical stylistics; text world theory; language awareness; critical understanding; reader-response skills

1. Introduction

EFL students encounter many problems and concerns in negotiating meaning of literary texts in their literature and language teaching courses (Van, 2009). There are many ways and pedagogical practices to eliminate these concerns. Bringing stylistic-based pedagogical practices and applications are among the tools that are believed to encourage student to negotiate meaning of literary text with more confidence. In a pedagogically-oriented stylistic classroom "students learn how to read between the lines and how to apply what they have learnt through their various purposes of working with texts" (Burke et al., 2012: 9). This study attempts to propose a teaching model using Text World Theory (Worth, 1999) to teach literature for ELT students. It is believed that these student in their later teaching career as English language teachers will be using it to teach English through literature with enthusiasm.

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1.1. Theoretical Framework

Stylistics, as an academic discipline, is “a method of linking linguistic form, via reader inference, to interpretation in a detailed way and thereby providing as much evidence as possible for and against particular interpretations of texts” (Short, 1996: 27). Thus, stylistics provides students with many tools encouraging them to negotiate and interpret the meaning of literary texts. Cognitive stylistics, as a sub-discipline of stylistics, empowers readers to generate different meaning and various interpretations by making connections between the texts and the readers. These connections enhance language awareness and interpretation among readers. Cognitive stylistics borrows many different cognitive related theories from different fields of studies such as psychology, to help readers to interpret the literary texts from different aspects. Text World Theory developed by Werth is one of the theories which this study adapts to offer some pedagogical models.

Pedagogical stylistics as a sub-discipline of stylistics intends to provide some practical tools for English teachers who teach literary texts. Stockwell maintains that “stylisticians are really the only people equipped to teach literature” (2007: 23). According to Clark and Zyngier:

Pedagogical stylistics will be concerned first and foremost with sensitizing learners to linguistic and poetic problems specific to a text (very often literary, though non-literary texts can be applicable), then encouraging them to suggest solutions in the most appropriate way, and investigating how the interaction between students, teachers and texts occurs. (Clark and Zyngier, 2003: 342)

Therefore, this approach enables students to understand and interpret the literary texts and then negotiate the meaning. Moreover, this approach is “student-centered, activity-based and process-oriented” (Carter 1996:3). Thus, the teachers in the literature classes should force their students to concentrate on activities to negotiate on meanings. These practices help them to enhance their language awareness and later literary awareness, “a process by means of which students perceive the effects that has been produced through the verbal patterning and the creative manipulation of language, before they can build substantiated readings of a text” (Zyngier, 199: 31).

1.2. Research questions

- 1- What are the views of the participants on the model?
- 2- Is the model developed by the researcher supported by the focus group?

2. Method

In this study, the researcher developed a model in relation with the TWT to be used in the literature and language teaching classes. In the course the semester developed model was taught and latter tested by the focus group to check its effectiveness. Participants in the focused group were selected according to some criteria. They were all typical of the research audience and were ensured of confidentiality of the information. The researcher ensured that all participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the focus group. On the bases of this criteria a total of 9 third year students, who were majoring at ELT department, were selected from the total of 12 students in the classroom to take part in the follow-up focus group interview. The students were classified as low-, moderate- and high-achiever participants according to their final exam results. A semi-structured focus group interview question was conducted with three students from each group.

2.1. Selecting Literary Texts

Adapting and adopting the most appropriate literary text in teaching English through literature to ELT students is very important. Thus, “literary texts must be carefully chosen, otherwise, the students will not respond to the text enthusiastically. Linguistically difficult literary texts eliminate the students’ motivation and stop them to work on the text for a long time” (Mohammadzadeh, 2015: 22). The selected literary texts must be interesting and should attract the attention of students in terms of topics and themes. Lima highlights that “texts which (a) engage affectively, (b) challenge cognitively, (c) promote language awareness, and (d) help learners to reflect critically about and respond imaginatively to the world where they live” (2010: 111) have the potential to be chosen. Students react positively towards the interesting topics and these kinds of texts encourage them to make connection with the real life and their environment. In fact, “nothing is more effective in killing the joy of reading than a boring text. However, what teachers see as interesting (or boring) may not necessarily be the same for the students – choice is again an important element” (ibid, 2010: 112).

In addition, regarding the genre of the literary text, short stories, poetry, and short drama plays are better than novels since the language of the novel is more complicated which needs more time to be examined. The main focus of this study is on the short stories and as a sample we chose *The Bracelet* a short story by Yoshiko Uchida to offer our model. The appropriateness of the language of the literary texts is also crucial. Some literary texts that are not recent and non-contemporary encompass lots of difficult and archive vocabularies that hinder the teaching and learning process. The language of the texts “should neither be too difficult that students cannot infer the meaning of particular lexical items and are forced to look up words too frequently; nor too easy that there is no challenge and no vocabulary gain” (Lima, 2010: 112).

2.2. Text World Theory and its Pedagogical Stylistic Model

Text World Theory can be used in Literature and Language Teaching classrooms to help students improve their critical understanding and interpretation. Text World Theory coined and developed by Werth (1999) and expanded by Gavin (2007), “is the conscious and common effort on the part of the maker and the receiver to make a world wherein propositions are extended and embodied, and finally result in semantic structure” (Werth, 1995: 95). This construction creates a construct, “a world”, in which the writer and the reader come together to consciously create a meaning. *The discourse world*, *the text world* and *the sub-world* are three layers of this theory in which participants, a writer/speaker and reader/listener, come together to create and build a world in their mind to negotiate the meaning. The following are short descriptions of the three interrelated layers of this theory.

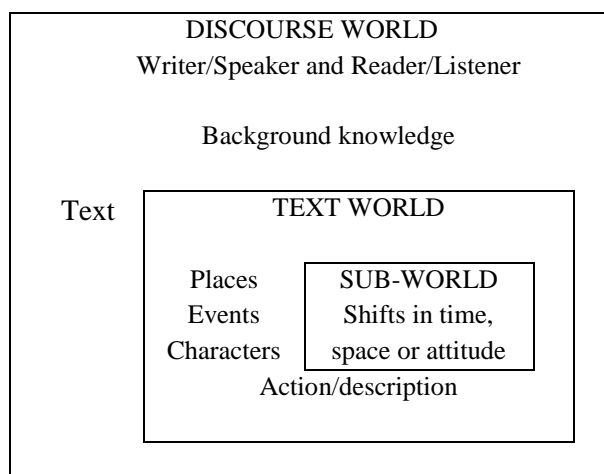


Figure 1. The text world theory architecture (Giovanelli, 2010, p. 219)

The discourse world: In this layer a connection and communication occurs between the text (writer/speaker) and the reader (reader/listener) as participants of a discourse. It is the first interaction between the interlocutors, the narrator/speaker/writer and reader/listener. According to Simpson it “is the immediate, higher-order conceptual space that is inhabited by an author and a reader” (2004: 91). Therefore, this layer “offers a means of exploring how a range of contextual factors have the potential to impact upon both the construction and comprehension of a given discourse”(Gavines, 2007: 10). An active communication between participants needs the personnel and cultural knowledge.

The text world: Discourse participants in this layer endeavor to create mental constructions. This occurs when they transmit the physical description into conceptual worlds through world-building elements that are time, place, characters and objects. These conceptual spaces “form the basis of our understanding of the physical space in which we exist, the passing of time, and even the societal structures and constraints which govern our behavior” (Gavins, 2007: 36).

The sub-world: This layer refers to a number of switches temporarily and/or spatially from the text world into the sub-worlds. Moreover, “attitudes expressed through modalised constructions form boulomaic modal worlds (stressing desire), deontic modal worlds (stressing obligation) and epistemic modal worlds (stressing belief or degrees of certainty). Subworlds are formed by text world triggers” (Giovanelli, 2010: 219). It is possible to state that there is a difference between world builders (WB) and Function Advancing Propositions (FA). World builders, as deictic, reference points, time, space, characters and object, give significant detail about the original texts (Giovanelli, 2010).

Table 1. Text world types and linguistic triggers (Giovanelli, 2010: 219)

World Type	Trigger
Text World	
World Switch	Deictic movement in time or space
Boulomaic modal world	Modal verb processes of desire or want
Deontic modal world	Modal verb processes of obligation or requirement
Epistemic modal world	Modal verb processes of knowledge belief or hypothesis

These modal-worlds coerce the reader to visualize sub-worlds while reading a short story. They also create many changes relaying on the reader's background knowledge (Giovanelli, 2010: 220). While Function Advancing Propositions "are verbs which can describe the enactors in relation to each other and the objects surrounding them, propel the action, or present an argument of some kind" (Obregon et al, 2009: 243). On the whole, since Text World Theory pays the way for the readers to examine texts and construct conceptual formations, it is applicable to analysis literary text. The main aim of this study is to offer a World Text Theory based model for English teachers to use in their literature and language teaching course. The present study uses the short story *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida to present the text world theory can be applied to in EFL context in order to teach literature to English language teachers.

2.3. Teaching Model

This model focuses on the short story entitled *The Bracelet* (1976) by Yoshiko Uchida, a Japanese American writer. Yoshiko Uchida in this short story tells the story of Ruri, a young Japanese-American girl, whose family is sent to a relocation center during the World War II. Upon their leaving to the camp, Ruri's best friend who is neighbor of hers gives her a bracelet as a goodbye gift. The model we offer here encompasses the following steps and applications.

2.3.1. Learning Objectives

By the end of the course instructed through TWT model, the students will be able to:

- discover how the short story presents compulsory immigrant's voices as victims of false accusations.
- examine how the Text World Theory is applicable to the literature course and how the text world and deictic shifts function in the short story
- examine how creating mental and conceptual constructions occurs in interpreting and analyzing the text.

2.3.2. Teaching Objectives

By the end of the course familiarity with TWT model will:

- provide student teachers with an applicable model for analyzing literary texts using the Text World Theory
- help student teachers improve and enlarge their language and literary awareness
- help student teachers how to create and develop pedagogically-oriented activities
- help student teachers to retain the gained skills and to develop them

2.3.3. Pre-reading Activities

During pre-reading activities, the teacher focuses on the main points of the short story. For example, the teachers explains that

People move from one place to another place for many reasons. This happens because of war, climate change, earthquake, and so on. Later, in order to activate their background knowledge we ask the following questions.

- How do you feel when you move from one place to another knowing that you could never go back to your home?
- Can you recall your own memories about the topic?
- What are the consequences of the compulsory immigration and evacuation?

2.3.4. While-Reading Activities

After the teacher activated students' knowledge about the main point in the short story, the teacher starts to read the text. After reading a few paragraphs from the short story, the teacher begins to ask students related focus questions. Focus questions will mainly help students to understand the Text World Theory and apply it to the short story. In fact, the teacher must explain the Text World Theory and its focal points. The focus questions part encompasses three sections, questions about the discourse world, the text world, and sub-worlds.

2.3.5. Focus questions related to the discourse world

In order to help participants, the reader and the author start a communication and construct a discourse world the following questions can be asked.

- Can you make a connection with the narrator or the main character of the story?
- Can you construct with the narrator, the main character, a conceptual space through using your own background knowledge and textual details, which is shared by the narrator?

This step is the first interaction between the interlocutors and is an active communication which occurs between participants. The following excerpt is the opening part of the short story:

"Mama, is it time to go?" I hadn't planned to cry, but the tears came suddenly, and I wiped them away with the back of my hand. I didn't want my older sister to see me crying. "It's almost time, Ruri," my mother said gently. Her face was filled with a kind of sadness I had never seen before.

I looked around at my empty room. The clothes that Mama always told me to hang up in the closet, the junk piled on my dresser, the old rag doll I could never bear to part with—they were all gone. There was nothing left in my room, and there was nothing left in the rest of the house. The rugs and furniture were gone, the pictures and drapes were down, and the closets and cupboards were empty. The house was like a gift box after the nice thing inside was gone; just a lot of nothingness.

It was almost time to leave our home, but we weren't moving to a nicer house or to a new town. It was April 21, 1942. The United States and Japan were at war, and every Japanese person on the West Coast was being evacuated¹ by the government to a concentration camp. Mama, my sister Keiko, and I were being sent from our home, and out of Berkeley,² and eventually out of California. (Uchida, 1996: 1)

In the opening part of the short story, Ruri the narrator and the main character, transmits her own emotional feelings to create a discourse-world wherein a communication takes place among participants, the narrator and the reader. Thus, this layer "deals with the immediate situation which surrounds human beings as they communicate with one another. The conscious presence of at least one speaker or writer and one or more listeners or readers is essential for a discourse-world to exist" (Gavin, 2007: 9). This paragraph is informative enough to create a discourse between the speaker and the reader. Ruri expresses her own inner world to the participants in this discourse. According to Peter Stockwell "factors in the discourse world include the *perceptions* of the immediate situation, and the *beliefs, knowledge, memories, hopes, dreams, intentions* and *imaginings* of the discourse participants" (2003: 136).

2.3.6. Focus questions related to the text world

These questions will be mainly on world-builders of time, place, characters, and events (and objects). These questions will help our students to transmit physical text into mental constructions. In fact, “mental image calls for a retracing, step by step, of the paths of meaning laid out in the original text” (Nash, 1989: 22).

- *When does the story happen?*
- *Where does the story happen?*
- *Who is the enactor or the main character?*
- *What are the surroundings and objects, and what are the main events?*

Another focus question that can be asked to the students is about shifts that they can identify while they are negotiating in this part. The teacher ask students to replace themselves with the main character in terms of the tense, place and the other aspects of modality, objects, desire, and possibility. The teacher asks students to underline the words or phrases that help them to experience the same situation with the characters form the short story.

2.3.7. Focus questions related to the sub-worlds

This layer refers to any change or switch in text-world which creates sub-worlds. The following are some questions teachers should ask their students to discover the sub-worlds.

- In the course of reading the short story what kinds of shifts in ime and, space or attitudes did you observe?
- Are there any shifts in boulomaic modal worlds? (desire)
- Are there any shifts in deontic modal worlds? (obligation)
- Are there any shifts in epistemic modal worlds? (belief or degrees of certainty)

In this part students express their feelings about the desires of the narrator. They also express the emotional thoughts about the challenges and obligation they encounter. Then, they will share their views about beliefs on disasters situations. After student respond to these questions, the teacher ask them to switch to the present time and replace the who, where, when, and what to their. It is believed that in the swathing process will enhance ELT students’ language awareness, creative reading skills as well as reader-response skills and deepen the interaction between readers and texts.

2.3.8. Post-reading activities

We can ask our students to dramatize the conceptual worlds they have created during the reading part. When they dramatize these worlds they will use the language and enhance their communicative language skills.

3. Findings and Results

The followings are the students’ responses in the focus group:

Question: How do you evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of Text World Theory approach in literature and language teaching classes?

Very low achiever participant 1: I think this approach helped me to understand and interpret the short story in an easy way. I learned that moving from one place to another place is very difficult. I think this approach improved my reading and speaking skills, because after reading I was able to retell to story.

Very low achiever participant 2: This approach helped me to focus on every detail in the short story. I think the approach helped me to express my ideas about the topic very easily.

Very low achiever participant 3: I think it is effective because I learn everything about the story. During the reading part I remembered a lot about immigration. I was able to retell to story and say a lot about the story to myself and my classmates.

Moderate achiever student 1: I think the approach improved my knowledge and skills about learning the literary text. It helped me remember every detail about the story later. This approach increased my level of confidence and after the class I was able to retell the whole story.

Moderate achiever student 2: I mainly like to learn new things and this approach was a new one for me. It helped me to learn every detail about the story. After we finished reading the story I knew every detail about it and I could summarize the story. I think this approach helped me to improve my reading and speaking skills.

Moderate achiever student 3: I think this approach helped me to be involved in the learning period. It helped me to understand the story in an easy way. I identified with the characters and I experienced what they did in the story. After reading the story I was able to paraphrase everything and I think the approach attracted my attention a lot and I am going to use it in my later teachings.

High achiever student 1: I think the approach is an effective one because I enjoyed a lot while we were reading it. It helped me to identify with the characters. I think the story taught me how it is difficult moving from one place to another place. I learned a lot about the compulsory immigration. I did sympathize with the characters in the story. I wish I had the power to stop compulsory immigrations. This approach increased my language awareness and critical thinking skills. The approach developed my empathy toward the immigrants.

High achiever student 2: The approach helped me to get acquaintance with the problems they experienced. It was like a close reading and I learned a lot of details about the story. It helped me to improve my reading skills. We focused on different topics within the story and this improved our critical reading and thinking skills. When we were reading the story in the class I identified with all the characters and sympathized with all of them.

High achiever student 3: I think this approach is effective because it helped me to understand the story very deeply. The approach helped me to improve my spoken language. I made a lot of connections while I was reading the short story. Reading the story helped me to recall my past memories. I think it improved my critical reading and thinking skills because after I became familiar with this approach I read the text very differently, I pay more attention on the language of text. I think it improved my language awareness level.

Students' responses to the focus group interview questions support this model. All students in all levels give positive feedback about the application of theory. Higher achiever students' responses comparing to lower and moderate are more comprehensive and supportive. Thus, it can be said that this approach is an effective approach and can be applied to literature and language teaching classes.

4. Rationale for the teaching of this model

Pre-reading activities will stimulate students' knowledge about the main points in the story and activate their background memories and recollections. This part will help students to think cognitively and make many connections between the themes of the short story and the real world. These connections will contribute to their personal development. It will also help them to increase their level of empathy towards sufferings in the world and around themselves. While-reading activities will

mainly help students to understand and comprehend the Text World Theory and apply and practice it from different aspects. The focus question in this part will enforce our students to be confident enough to initiate the first interpretation. The answers given by the students to the focus questions about the discourse world, the text world, and sub-worlds will help them to comprehend and recognize the theory deeply and will enhance students literary and language awareness, creative reading skills, and reader-response skills and deepen the interaction between readers and texts. These kinds of awareness “promote students’ investigations of how texts come to mean, and where ‘responses’, not to mention ‘literature’, come from” (Hall, 1999: 3). The awareness they acquire also help them to “become more reflective as learners, that is, that they become more conscious of texts and stretches of language as containing messages which need to be negotiated for meaning” (Carter, 1997: 167,168). Post-reading activities will encourage students to practice the theory from different aspects and these practices will help them to retain and maintain the theory for a long time. On the whole, as Burke et al. highlight “pedagogical stylistics puts emphasis on letting students do what they like doing, allowing them to learn stylistics through reading and analyzing texts: in short, learning stylistics through doing stylistics” (Burke et al, 2012: 2)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study attempted to apply the Text World Theory as a sub-discipline of cognitive stylistics to a short story teaching in English language classes and endeavored to propose and offer some pedagogically-oriented stylistic activities as a teaching model. These activities provide *students teachers* with the necessary tools for an analysis of a literary text in order to improve students’ language and literary awareness. Improvements in language and literary awareness stimulate “sensitization of the reader to the effect of linguistic patterns and their contextualization and awakens students personal responses to the story” (Mohammadzadeh, 2015: 25). As Zyngier maintains “literary awareness aims at sensitizing students to stylistic devices in a literary text so as to enable them to build justifiable and more objective textual interpretations” (Zyngier, 1994: 298). The proposed activities on the discourse world, the text world and the sub-worlds help students to the retrospective reading leading them to interpret it more deeply. On the whole, these theory based pedagogical activates help students to engage affectively, challenge cognitively, promote language awareness, and help them to reflect critically about and respond imaginatively to the world where they live (Lima, 2010: 111). The final part in which students dramatize the short story will allow them to retain the Text World Theory in an easy way and to develop their writing skills. Moreover, using a pedagogical stylistic analysis will enhance student teachers’ motivation because it enables them to create their own mental constructions. Students’ responses to focus group interview questions supported the model, so this model can be applied in Literature and Language Teaching classes. For further studies, it is possible to create different pedagogically-oriented stylistic activities in relation to the Text World Theory from different literary texts to empower ELT student teachers in terms of language and literary awareness and equip them with enough tools to teach language through literature in their later career.

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Metin dünya(sı) teorisi yaklaşımı ile İngilizce dil öğretiminde kısa hikâye öğretimi: Bir pedagojik deyişbilim çalışması

Öz

Bu çalışma, Metin Dünya(sı) Teorisinin deyiş bilimsel özelliklerinin öğrencilerin eleştirel anlamalarını ve yorumlarını geliştirmelerine katkı sağlamak için edebiyat ve dil öğretimi sınıflarında nasıl kullanılabileceğini incelenmektedir. Bu teorisinin pedagojik deyiş bilimsel uygulaması, İngilizce dili öğretiminde öğrencilerin dil farkındalığını, yaratıcı okuma becerilerini ve okur geribildirim becerilerini geliştirecek ve okuyucular ile metinler arasındaki etkileşimi derinleştirecektir. Çalışma, önce edebiyat ve dil öğretimi kurslarında kısa öykülerin kullanılmasının etkililiği üzerine odaklanacak ve daha sonra Yoshiko Uchida'nın Bilezik başlıklı kısa öyküsü Metin Dünya(sı) Teorisinin üç katmanına yani "söylem dünyası", "Metin dünyası", ve "alt dünya" bölümlerine uyarlanacak. Bu uyarlama sonucu öğrenciler a) *Metin Dünya(sı) Teorisine göre öyküyü oluşturan temel yapı taşlarının neler olduğunu tanımlayabilecek?* ve b) *Bu temel yapı taşları öğrencilerin metin ile bağlantı kurmalarını ve yorumlamalarına nasıl olanak sağlayacak?* sorularına cevap vererek pedagojik deyiş bilimsel uygulamalar önermektedir. Bu daha sonra, öğrencilerin ana karakterlerin dünyalarıyla kendi dünyaları arasında bağlantı kurmalarına yardımcı olacaktır. Odak grubunun sonuçları, bu bağlantıların öğrencilerin dil farkındalığını, yaratıcı okuma becerilerini ve okur geribildirim becerilerinin geliştirdiğini ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pedagojik deyiş bilim; metin dünya(sı) teorisi; dil bilinci, eleştirel anlama; okur geribildirim becerileri

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