

Gavins, Joanna. *Text World Theory: An Introduction*. (2007). Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP. ISBN# 978-0-74862300-6. 224 pp.

Many language and literature departments did not notice the cognitive turn textual studies took in the early- to mid-1990s. For instance, George Lakoff's work in conceptual metaphor is perhaps the only widely known cognitive linguistic methodology in the United States because of its application to American politics. However, by the mid-1990s, fields of language analysis such as stylistics, linguistics, and rhetoric introduced analytical tools from psychological schema theory, artificial intelligence, and empirical research to investigate how social and stylistic language affects a reader's interpretation. However, the tools and interests of this new field were user-friendly to those outside of linguistics, and the field quickly grew to include literary theorists, educators, and students of media.

Many language theorists think of Chomsky when cognition is mentioned in conjunction with language. However, the new field of cognitive linguistics is based in social cognition, embodiment, and the idea that literature or literary language and rhetorical figures are based in the processes of an *ordinary cognition*. These newer socio-cognitive methodologies of linguistics stress semantics and pragmatics, not syntax; syntax is seen as an additional contributor to overall semantic and pragmatic effect. Thus, this new field of cognitive linguistics is interested in how readers construct meaning through cultural knowledge, experience, and body-based orientation schemas. With an interest in figurative language as a product of ordinary cognition with heavy pragmatic and ideological effect, cognitive linguistics quickly moved beyond literature to everyday discourse.

Joanna Gavins' *Text World Theory: An Introduction* is, indeed, an introduction to one methodology inside the field of cognitive linguistics. If you are familiar with text world theory, or with cognitive linguistics, you will not receive any high-powered, microscopic advances in the theory in Gavins' book. You will, however, receive a readable summary of text world theorists' scholarship. While this summary obscures the issues in text world theory that are still debatable, the book does

provide text world theory a cohesive terminology for the first time in its history. Moreover, the book is scholarly enough for the unfamiliar, and presented in layperson's language without the deluge of references to foundational research which were both the bane and bulwark of previous books on text world theory by Paul Werth and Elena Semino. Thus, the book will function nicely as an introduction for undergraduate and graduate seminars. For students and teachers, each chapter ends with sections entitled "Further Investigation" that contain exercises and text excerpts for analysis. For scholars, a "Further Reading" section explains the foundational research in psychology, language philosophy, and (mainly functional) linguistics, and these sections update a bibliography of articles since text world theory's inception.

The first chapter, "Conceptualising Language," outlines most of text world theory's parameters, but Gavins reserves some basic features for later chapters. In short, text world theory is interested in both rhetorical purpose and poetic device and how mental representations (or mental models) called "text worlds" are constructed. Such worlds are context-sensitive and allow for *incrementation*, the "private to public transfer of knowledge" (21). Gavins sees this facet as the theory's major advantage over other discourse theories, including other cognitive linguistic theories.

In text world theory, readers first build a possible world that is rule-governed and corresponds to our actual world. The body is heavily involved--"all approaches to cognitive discourse study are founded on the basic assumption that the mind and body are inextricably linked" (36). Thus, we are often "mapping our physical experience onto unfamiliar situations" (11). Because experiential image-mapping is so important in communication and interpretation, a notion of the self in space and time (the deictic *origo*) is the basic starting point of all text world mapping. When understanding texts, we must adopt the *origo* of an *enactor*, the enactor being any element that guides us into and through a text world. Even texts as simple as electronic directions to use a restroom in London's subway, one of Gavin's many examples, require us to project ourselves spatio-temporally upon the enactor. As texts become more complex, we begin to have degrees of "empathetic identification" (64) with the

enactor--a literary character or conversation participant, for example. Through degrees of empathy, text world theory can gauge the "experiential significance" (64) of a text, a major advantage of the theory.

How are a variety of reader knowledges activated in a text? The principle of *text-drivenness* accounts for such knowledges. In one of many examples, Gavins examines the genre of the obituary, finding that the variety of knowledges required are those of "British names, Christianity, the typographical conventions of broadsheet newspapers, and the typical readership of the *Daily Telegraph*" (30). Gavins often examines multiple examples of a genre, such as the obituary, to show how non-literary forms of discourse require great amounts of experiential knowledge and how non-literary and literary language utilize the same conceptual categories. Moreover, the multiple examples serve as a corpus study that builds an understanding of a genre and its knowledge fields. The examples also provide templates for the production of close readings through text world theory.

Such knowledges in the text world relate directly to the *discourse world*, the world of all reader knowledge. The discourse world "deals with the immediate situation which surrounds human beings as they communicate with one another" (9) and includes context, expectation, and cultural and linguistic constraints. Thus, the epistemological level of information may be highly uniform and verifiable between the discourse world and the text world, as with pragmatic communication. Or the epistemological level may be highly differentiated between the two worlds, as with an untrustworthy literary narrator in which the reader is merely an eavesdropper and cannot verify information. Entire *epistemic worlds* can be constructed, and many texts contain *world switches* or *modal worlds* containing varying degrees of coherence between the ontology of the discourse and text worlds.

While these ideas are reminiscent of text-based and cognitive linguistic methodologies, text world theory offers two new evaluative criteria: world-building elements and function-advancing propositions. Function-advancers are utterances containing an actor and action that also include a goal. World-builders are based upon the relationship to the projected embodiment of the *origo*. World-

builders can be elements such as time, location, objects, and enactors. The evaluative criteria are borrowed from functional linguistic notions of relational, mental, and existential processes. Although Gavins' presentation of the evaluative criteria is not exhaustive, her examples have both depth and breadth. Representative genres include song lyrics, football broadcasts, horoscopes, advertisements, parenting books, tabloid magazines, novel excerpts, and more. All of this is done in the service of one additional major concept of text world theory: modality.

Epistemic modal worlds negotiate knowledge between the discourse and text world. *Deontic modal worlds* are mental models with varying degrees of obligation. *Boulomaic modal worlds* are hypothetical or unrealized "wish" worlds. Through linguistic analysis, worlds and world switches between modal worlds can be identified. I suggest that this is a strength of text world theory because the ability to identify epistemological checks on language and the use of obligation in language relates directly to foundational rhetorical concepts such as audience and purpose. In linguistics, the modal world theory is related to speech act theory, Gricean maxims, and similar linguistic research.

The book closes with basic chapters on cognitive narrative and conceptual metaphor. The afterward suggests lines of future research including sense and emotion, texture, and a reader's resisting identification with a text.

The strength of text world theory is also its weakness. The theory's emphasis on the construction of mental models de-emphasizes how texts "mean." Gavins spends little time discussing how ideological content is created in the human mind. Culture, embodiment, and experience are informants of the reading process, and they provide hermeneutical systems of meaning that Gavins' focus on embodied mental models and text worlds does not provide, although it should be noted that the discipline of cognitive linguistics is producing research into varieties of hermeneutical influence.

*Text World Theory* is a valuable asset to those working in interdisciplinary research in the social uses of language for two major reasons. First, the theory's emphasis on a reader's mental models makes the book applicable to literacy and communication studies of many varieties. Second,

text world theory can frame the act of interpretation before leaping into default assumptions about a text's interpretive content, which is a benefit many theories of language do not offer. While the first point may make text world theory congruent with cultural studies, the second point provides a solid framework for the systematic analysis of a reader's allegiances to particular values, be they ideological or merely values and mental models based upon universals of cognitive research into embodiment. This second point demonstrates that text world theory could be a valuable tool in mapping reader's mental associations in the areas of epistemology, obligation, and desire. Language-minded researchers of culture, language, and meaning would benefit from text world theory when looking to define both the poetics and politics inherent in text analysis, and when attempting to analyze separately and together the role of embodiment and culture in the interpretive process.

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