

INTERPRETING A POEM OF BEN JONSON, “SONG: TO CELIA”

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ABSTRACT

Discourse analysis is analysis of language in use (Brown and Yule, 1983). How the language-users interpret what other language-users intend to convey and how they make sense of what they read in texts, understand what speakers mean despite what they say, recognize connected as opposed to jumbled or incoherent discourse, and successfully take part in that complex activity called conversation.

A poem can be interpreted through discourse analysis approach (Brown and Yule, 1983). Using this approach, the meaning of a poem can be revealed exactly the same as or very close to what the poet want to say or send the message.

This article tries to interpret “Song: To Celia”, one of Ben Jonson’s poems through knowledge of the world or schema, context and coherence.

Knowledge of the world or Schema plays key roles in many cognitive processes. They help us pay attention, comprehend, interpret, remember, make inferences, set expectations, reason, solve problems, understand language structures, read, write, explain what we know, and have a sense of humor. To interpret this poem, knowledge about love is important, and also the schemata about who the speakers and the listeners are. The speaker in "Song: To Celia" is a man who opens with a plea for his lady to express her love by gazing upon him. And the listener of this poem is an imagined listener, a lady, who refuses the speaker’s love.

According to Hymes (1964), there are nine contexts in discourse analysis but ‘context of using code’ is used to understand the symbols used in this poem, such as: “wine” symbolizes something better, nicer, and intoxicating and “a rosy wreath” symbolizes the greatest love of someone. And ‘context of genre’ is also used in understanding the poem itself or the terms of the poem, likes ‘figurative languages’. In this poem, there are two kinds of figurative languages, *personification* and *allusion*

Coherence which has to do with the meaning of the text (discourse) and context, may refer to elements of knowledge or to cognitive structures that do not have a linguistic realization but are implied by the language used, and thus influence the reception of the message by the interlocutor. Coherence of this poem can be seen from the unity of the words which produces meaning. As a whole the meaning of this poem is telling about the reflection of admiration a man toward his lady love, and this man loves her very much. The speaker (the man) asks the listener (the lady love) look at him only with her eyes to refill her secret to him, and he will do the same

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis or discourse studies, is a general term for a number of approaches to analyzing written, spoken, signed language use or any significant semiotic event. The objects of discourse analysis, such as, discourse (text), writing, talk, conversation, communicative event, etc., are variously defined in terms of coherent sequences of sentences, propositions, speech acts or turns-at-talk.

Discourse analysis is analysis of language in use (Brown and Yule, 1983). How the language-users interpret what other language-users intend to convey and how they make sense of what they read in texts, understand what speakers mean despite what they say, recognize connected as opposed to jumbled or incoherent discourse, and successfully take part in that complex activity called conversation. It can be said that the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs.

As Candlin (1997: ix) said that discourse analysis refers to language in use, as a process which is socially situated.

Kartomihardjo (1992:1) says that discourse analysis tries to analyze the meaning of larger unit of language or a discourse as close as possible. It is also used to interpret a written or spoken discourse in a real situation.

A poem is a work of art which is created by the poet according to his imagination and understanding of the world of his own creation, so the schema of a poem must be in accordance with the schema which is in the poet's mind. Therefore to be able to interpret a poem, a reader should be able to get the poet's interpretation of his poem through his publication or through a discussion with him, or through reading the writings of the poet's critic. Cook (in Kartomihardjo, 1996) stated that any deviation from the linguistic rules, either grammatical or lexical, may influence the meanings of the poem which is often purposefully created by the writer. And if possible we should know who the poem is directed to and in what condition or what era the poem was written.

A poem can be interpreted through discourse analysis approach (Brown and Yule, 1983). Using this approach, the meaning of a poem can be revealed exactly the same as or very close to what the poet want to say or send the message.

To gain the meaning or the message of the poem, the readers need to know the discourse analysis apparatus, such as, knowledge of the world or schema, context, local interpretation, analogy, presupposition, inference, cohesion, coherence, reference, and substitution.

This article tries to interpret "Song: To Celia", one of Ben Jonson's poems through knowledge of the world or schema, context and coherence. Knowledge of the world or schema is considered as the most important part in understanding discourse as well as interpreting the message, but it will be better if it is helped by other discourse

instruments like context and coherence to gain the closest meaning or the real meaning of the poem.

Knowledge of the World or Schema

Knowledge of the world (Clark and Clark, 1977) is the readers' general socio-cultural knowledge. This general knowledge about the world underpins the readers' interpretation not only of discourse, but of virtually every aspect of the readers' experience. Rumelhart's classic (1980: 34) defined a schema as "a data structure for representing the generic concepts stored in memory". Yet he went on to state that "there are schemata representing our knowledge about all concepts: those underlying objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions". Thus, schemata are frequently defined as the form of mental representation for generic knowledge, but are then used as the term for the representation of all knowledge.

Schema or knowledge of the world consists of the representation of a phenomenon an experience, a thing or anything at all that has been perceived by any one of our senses or understood by our thinking. Schema plays key roles in many cognitive processes. They help us pay attention, comprehend, interpret, remember, make inferences, set expectations, reason, solve problems, understand language structures, read, write, explain what we know, and have a sense of humor.

According to Guy Cook (in Kartomihardjo,1996) Schema can be distinguished into 3 folds: (1) **World Schema** which contains the representations of certain things in our brains which we understand and which has more or less general or universal nature. (2) **Text Schema** which contains our understanding of certain texts; and (3) **Language Schema** which contains understanding certain things in accordance with a certain language.

Context

Hymes (1964) says that there are nine kinds of context in an interaction, they are as the following:

1. Participants' context of situation:
Participants in an interaction consist of speakers and listeners. Each person has her /his own important role as well as their social status and their relationship. Besides, the situation determines their comprehension in understanding the message.
2. Context of time and place:
In a certain situation and place, the participants will use different language. For instance, in a formal and an informal situation, participants use different kind of language.
3. Context of topic:
Using a certain topic, an interaction goes smoothly. But in a real life, topic can be very complex because participants can change and switch the topic very quickly and unconsciously.
4. Context of using media:
Media to deliver message can be in written, spoken, sign forms or others.
5. Context of using code:

Participants choose a certain code in delivering her/his message. It can be a special symbol when a man delivers his feeling (love) to a woman by giving a nice flower, usually a red rose

6. Context of message and content:

Participants can deliver a certain message in appropriate way so the content can be gained by the listeners or the readers clearly.

7. Context with has connection with special event:

Participants can use special event in delivering their messages. For example, a mother makes a party for her son's successful in career to deliver her great gratitude to God

8. Context of intonation:

From the intonation which is used by the participant in a certain interaction, it can indicate the interaction itself whether it is a serious one, sarcasm, humor, or others. If the speaker change the intonation of a sentence, it means he/she change its meaning

9. Context of genre:

Genre is included in communication like poem, praying, idiom, advertisement, etc. which can be in narrative, argumentative, and descriptive text

A discourse can be interpreted base on the context. Usually it uses combination of two or three kinds of context.

Coherence

Coherence which has to do with the meaning of the text (discourse) and context, may refer to elements of knowledge or to cognitive structures that do not have a linguistic realization but are implied by the language used, and thus influence the reception of the message by the interlocutor.

Coherence has several concepts:

1. Coherence consists of textual aspect and psychological aspect in the form of ability in interpreting discourse.
2. The readers' ability in discovering text coherence has been gained naturally.
3. Textual coherence is a situational representation that produces a unity of meaning and message of a text.

A Poem of Ben Jonson

Knowledge of the world or schema, and context of using code and context of genre, and coherence, are used to understand this poem:

Song: To Celia

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.
I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honouring thee
As giving it a hope that there

It could not withered be;
But thou thereon didst only breathe
And sent'st it back to me,
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear
Not of itself but thee!

Before interpreting and understanding this poem, we should know the writer of this poem. Ben Jonson (1572-1637) is the classicist, made poet laureate by King James. Although Ben Jonson is best known for his plays, which he was a dramatist following the rules of classics: The "unities" of time, place and action, he introduced into drama the conception of "humorous": blood = Sanguine; phlegm = phlegmatic; yellow bile = choleric; black bile = melancholic, which determine a person's character, his poetry had also a significant impact on seventeenth-century poets and has come to be as highly regarded as that of his contemporary William Shakespeare. Edmund Gosse, in *The Jacobean Poets*, concludes that Jonson was "rewarded by the passionate devotion of a tribe of wits and scholars . . . and he enjoys the perennial respect of all close students of poetry."

Jonson's lyric ballad "Song: To Celia" is his most beloved and anthologized poem. Soon after its publication, it was put to music by an anonymous composer, after which it became a popular song in public houses. "Song: To Celia" was included in the book *The Forest*, published in 1616. It appears in the sixth edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (1993).

Jonson's "Song: To Celia" is a short monologue in which a lover addresses his lady in an effort to encourage her to express her love for him. Jonson includes conventional imagery, such as eyes, roses, and wine, but employs them in inventive ways. As a result, the poem becomes a lively, expressive song extolling the immortality of love. John Addington Symonds, in his 1886 study of Jonson, calls the poem a masterpiece in its "purely lyric composition" and individuality. He concludes that Jonson's lyrics "struck the key-note of the seventeenth century."

Jonson borrowed the conventions of courtly love for the poem but manipulated them to create his unique voice. Traditionally, the lover in these poems is stricken by his lady's beauty, which causes him to idealize her. Ever obedient to her wishes, the humble lover strives to be worthy of her. His feelings of love ennoble him and lead him on the path to moral excellence.

Jonson expresses the cult of the beloved in his poem through his vision of the lady whose kisses are sweeter than the nectar of the gods and whose breath can grant immortality. Yet this speaker does not humble himself to his mistress. He has a calm assurance not found in conventional courtly love poems.

To interpret this kind of poem, knowledge about love is important, and also the schemata about who the speakers and the listeners are.

The speaker in "Song: To Celia" is a man who opens with a plea for his lady to express her love by gazing upon him. His plea is assertive, in the form of a command to drink to him with her eyes. He wants more than an expression of her love, however; he wants a pledge. He notes this in the second line:

.....
And I will pledge with mine;
.....

He declares that he will return the pledge with his own eyes. The reference to the cup that is commonly filled with wine becomes an apt metaphor for what he is asking from his lady. One usually makes a toast, a pledge of some sort, when first sipping a cup of wine. The speaker wants his lady to make a pledge to him with her eyes rather than while drinking from a cup of wine. This pledge would be more personal and so more meaningful to him.

By suggesting that, his lady could convey such a pledge through her gaze, he pays tribute to her expressive eyes. He suggests that their connection is so intimate that they do not need the words of a speech to communicate their feelings for each other. This act reflects medieval love conventions, which propose that love is received through the eyes.

When the speaker gives his lady an alternative way to express her love, he suggests that she may be reluctant to do so. Leaving a kiss in the cup would allow her to respond to him in a more modest manner.

It can be seen in:

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not look for wine.
.....

This alternative, he states, would be just as pleasing to him. When he insists that he will "not look for wine," he implies that her kiss will intoxicate him more than any alcohol could. Wine would be an inadequate replacement for her love.

Jonson smoothly integrates the images of eyes, drinking, and wine in these first lines, which reinforces and heightens his speaker's expression of love and longing. Initially, the metaphor of drinking with one's eyes seems too force, yet eyes produce liquid and can "brim over" with tears of sadness or joy. This liquidity, rather than that of wine, becomes the speaker's preferred method of demonstration. The image of the kiss also integrates smoothly with the wine.

The speaker, who is addressing his lady love, who spurned him by returning his gift of a 'rosy wreath'. He tries to persuade his lover not only with words but he also sends her a rosy wreath as a representation of his deep love. He wishes so much that his lady love responses his love.

It can be seen in:

.....
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.
I sent thee late a rosy wreath,

Not so much honouring thee
 As giving it a hope that there
 It could not withered be;
 But thou thereon didst only breathe
 And sent'st it back to me,
 Since when it grows, and smells, I swear
 Not of itself but thee!

The listener of this poem is an imagined listener, a lady, who refuses the speaker's love. Only rarely do poets address us directly. For this reason, it is important to determine what is meant when a poet uses the "you" ("thee") pronoun. Often the "you" may refer to the speaker himself or herself, and not to listeners or us as readers. Although an imagined listener, like Jonson's lady friend, does not participate in the poem, something that person has done has prompted the speaker to begin writing.

Context of using code is used to understand the symbols used in this poem, such as: "wine" symbolizes something better, nicer, and intoxicating. "Jove's nectar": Jove or Jupiter was the principal Roman god; nectar was the drink of the gods; it's believed that if a mortal drinking it, it would attain immortality, so it symbolizes something beautiful and nice. And "a rosy wreath" symbolizes the greatest love of someone. In Roman, a rosy wreath was used as a crown for a goddess.

Context of genre is used to understand the poem itself or the terms of the poem, likes 'figurative languages'. In this poem, there are two kinds of figurative languages. They are:

1. Personification:

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
 And I will pledge with mine;

.....

As if in these lines show that eyes can drink while in the reality only human beings can do that (drink).

.....

The thirst that from the soul doth rise
 Doth ask a drink divine;

.....

One who can be thirsty is only human beings but in these lines say that soul can be thirsty and it divine for holy drinking eyes.

2. Allusion:

.....
 But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
 I would not change for thine.

.....

"Jove's nectar" refers to gods' tales. It was the drink of the gods or the Jove's food.

Coherence of this poem can be seen from the unity of the words which produces meaning. As a whole the meaning of this poem is telling about the reflection of admiration a man toward his lady love, and this man loves her very much. The

speaker (the man) asks the listener (the lady love) look at him only with her eyes to refill her secret to him, and he will do the same. Although he never kisses her, he won't look for better things outside because their relationship is not just a kiss but more than that, a deep love. He needs a holy drink to quench his thirst that comes from the soul, and he wants something secret which is adore or real. So even though he got Jove's food (Jove's nectar), he won't change her with everything because she is very valuable for him.

When he sent his lady love a rosy wreath, it is not because of honoring her but he wants her to blow her breath to the rosy wreath to make it grows and smells her. But unfortunately, she only breathes it and sends it back to him.

Repetition of sounds in a poem can emphasize key words and images and so create poetic structure. In addition, sounds can provide pleasure. Jonson uses alliteration, the repetition of initial consonant sounds, in line 6 in the words "drink" and "divine" to emphasize the value the speaker places on his mistress's kiss. He repeats this technique in line 9 with the words "rosy" and "wreath," which highlights her connection with nature. Jonson makes a clever connection between the speaker and his mistress through examples of consonance, the repetition of final consonant sounds, as well as word placement. He ends lines 2, 4, 6, and 8 with the words "mine," "wine," "divine," and "thine," respectively, suggesting that the union of the two would be more divine than wine.

CONCLUSION

Ethnography of Communication is one of the specific theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches used in linguistic discourse analysis. It also emphasize different aspects of language use, it views language as social interaction, and is concerned with the social contexts in which discourse is embedded.

Often a distinction is made between 'local' structures of discourse (such as relations among sentences, propositions, and turns) and 'global' structures, such as overall topics and the schematic organization of discourses and conversations. For instance, many types of discourse begin with some kind of global 'summary', in titles, headlines, leads, abstracts, and so on.

Interpreting discourse, in this case 'a poem', can be done through knowledge of the world or schema that is helped by others like context and coherence.

Moreover, the similarity of the poet's and the reader's interpretation of the poem makes the poem easier to be understood. While coherence is used to interpret syntactical structures and vocabularies which are used in the poem although there are some ungrammatical structures as well as uncommon words, but still the reader can understand the meaning and catch the message.

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