

NARRATOLOGY & LANGUAGE TEACHING

ELİF TOPRAK



Elif Leyla TOPRAK
Narratology and Language Teaching
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Adakale Sokak 4/B Yenışehir-Ankara
Tel: (312) 430 67 50-430 67 51-435 44 60
Belgegeçer: (312) 430 67 51
İnternet: www.pegema.com.tr
e-posta: pegema@pegema.com.tr

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Elif Leyla TOPRAK

Assist.Prof. Elif Leyla Toprak received her BA degree at The Department of English Language and Education in Cukurova University in 1985. She started teaching at The Department of Foreign Languages in Gaziantep University in 1988. She taught English for 3 years before she was awarded by The Council of Higher Education for an MA. She received her MA

degree at The Department of English Studies in Nottingham University-U.K. Her MA dissertation is on "Teaching English Through a Short Story : A Study of Language-based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature to First Year Students". A short story written by Ruth Rendell entitled "Dying Happy" has been referred for the language-based approaches which have been popular following 1980s. She was invited by CDELT 13th National Symposium which held in Cairo where she presented a paper entitled "Teaching Linguistics for Teaching Literature" in 1993. Miss Toprak was awarded by The Council of Higher Education for her PhD degree in 1993. She did her PhD on "Narrative Comprehension" and received her degree in Kent University at Canterbury-U.K.

Miss Toprak is an Assist.Prof at The Faculty of Arts and Sciences in Gaziantep University. She is currently involved in teaching a range of postgraduates in the realm of English Literature.

To My Father Who Was A Devotee of Education

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SCHEMATA THEORIES

1.1. Introduction

In the following chapter, approaches to the structure of the knowledge stored in the memory, namely the Long Term Memory (henceforth LTM), will be reviewed. Theories will be illustrated beginning from the most general one, that is the schema theory, towards the more specific ones, namely the frame and the script theories.

The chapter starts with a brief history of the origins of the schemata theories (1.2) including various definitions of a "schema" (1.2.1). The prominent figures' ideas, e.g. Kant's (1.2.2) and Bartlett (1.2.3) which inspired the proponent schemata theoreticians are stated.

The following section (1.3) revises the schema theory which was put forward by Rumelhart and Ortony (1977). The section devoted to the schema theory then goes on to demonstrate the cognitive processes, i.e. top-down and bottom-up (1.3.2).

The chapter continues (1.3) with the presentation of script theory (Schank and Abelson, 1977). The detailed analysis of event sequences through the script theory provides bases for the understanding of narrative theories which will be found later in this study (chp 5). Frame theory (1.4) of Minsky (1975) is also studied since it is considered as the starting point of script theory.

1.2. The Schemata Theories

1.2.1. What Is a Schema ?

The origin of the concept schema [plural- schemata, although, Mandler (1984:2) suggests using the English plural form "schemas"]¹ has been the main concern of those scholars . Cook (1994:15-16) connects the usage of the word schema to the word "scheme" , as a high-flown synonym of the word under investigation, which means "a plan or a map" . According to Cook, those two words, schema and scheme can substitute of each other.

¹Some scholars such as Cohen [1988:26 in Cohen et al.(eds.)] prefers using "schemas" that is "the anglicised version of the original Greek word". In this work, the terms schema (singular) and schemata (plural) are used.

2 Narratology and Language Teaching

Knowledge about the world is called semantic knowledge which refers to various objects, events, situations and actions (2.2.1). Knowledge is organised and structured. Our past experiences are stored in "patterned units of memory" (Young,1991:1125). Those units are "mental representations" [Cohen,1988:26 in Cohen et al.(eds.)]. The substance of those patterned units which are called schemata is general knowledge which "represents what is believed to be generally true of a class of things, events, or situations" [Anderson,1977(b):2]. In the following, ideas of the influential schema theoreticians, Kant and Bartlett, will be introduced.

1.2.2 Kant

Kant's (1781/1787) "Critique of Pure Reason" ² [Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977:100 in Anderson et al.(eds.)] has been the earliest of the sources corresponding to the domain of philosophy and psychology . As a philosopher-writer Kant influenced most of the current cognitive science theories, whose research originated in the fields of learning or reading. Gladsky (1992:39), as one of the contemporary supporters of Kant, mentions that Kant's "observations....link him to proponents of the current schema-theoretic interpretation of the psychological processes involved in reading".

1.2.3 Bartlett

The most well-known and influential European psychologist [Anderson, 1977(a):417] who used the term schema in the sense that it is used today is Sir Frederic Charles Bartlett (1932) following Head [1920, cited in Rumelhart, 1980:33 in Spiro et al.(eds.)]. Thorndyke and Haye-Roth (1979:82) mention Head's (1920) hypothesis as follows "anything that enters consciousness is charged with its relation to something that has gone before".

Bartlett's ideas have been reviewed in most of the cognitive science theories such as the gestalt tradition as well as others (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983:3 cited in Cook,1994:16) (see 1.5 for a detailed discussion). Firstly, his ideas particularly that concern *above down*, in other words *top-down* process (1.3.2), were reintroduced by many of the contemporary comprehension oriented schemata theories, e.g. the schema theory (1.3), frame (1.4) and script (1.5) which will be discussed later in this chapter. Secondly, Bartlett was credited with devoting his researches to the display of "the inadequacies of theories of episodic memory relying on 'traces' of unique experiences" (1932:204-205 cited in Cook,1994:16).

²Almost all scholars , for example Gladsky (1992:39), Sadoski et al. (1991:466), Adams et al. [1979:1 in Freedle (ed.)] and Rumelhart et al. [1989:17 in McClelland et al.(eds.)] who discuss "The schema theory" refer Kant's work as the starting point.