

***IN THE NAME OF GOD***

***THE MERCIFUL,***

***THE COMPASSIONATE***

1410.4

**University of Guilan**  
**Faculty of Literature and the Humanities**  
**English Language Department**

**The Process of Recognizing the Meaning of a  
Literary Prose Text on the Basis of Discourse**

By  
**Shirin Shafiei Ebrahimi**

Supervisor:  
**Dr Mansour Hashemi**

Advisor:  
**Dr Zhaleh Hassaskhah**

**January 2009**

**II**





باسمه تعالی

شماره:  
تاریخ:

صورتجلسه دفاع از پایان نامه تحصیلی کارشناسی ارشد

با تأییدات الهی و با استعانت از حضرت ولی عصر "عج"، دفاع از پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد

خانم شیرین شفیعی ابراهیمی : در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی گرایش با عنوان :

فرایند تشخیص معنای متن منثور ادبی بر پایه گفتمان

در ساعت ۱۱ روز چهارشنبه مورخ ۸۸/۱۰/۱۶ به ارزش ۴ واحد، در محل تالار حکمت دانشکده علوم انسانی دانشگاه گیلان تشکیل گردید. هیأت داوران به شرح زیر که قبلاً پایان نامه ایشان را مطالعه نموده اند، پس از استماع دفاعیات و پرسشهای لازم در زمینه علمی و تحقیقاتی ایشان، نتیجه را به شرح زیر اعلام می دارند:

پایان نامه نامبرده با نمره  و با امتیاز عالی ، بسیار خوب ، خوب ، قابل قبول  مورد تأیید قرار گرفت. پایان نامه در وضع فعلی با تصحیحات جزئی مورد قبول است و نامبرده نمره ۱۶... و امتیاز عالی ، بسیار خوب ، خوب ، قابل قبول  دریافت نمود. پایان نامه و پروژه به شکل فعلی، مورد تأیید قرار نگرفت و پیشنهاد شد که...

امضا	تخصص	مرتبۀ دانشگاهی	اعضای هیأت داوران
	زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی	استادیار	استاد(ان) راهنما: ۱- آقای دکتر منصور هاشمی ۲- استاد(ان) مشاور: ۱- خانم دکتر ژاله حساسنخواه ۲- استادان یا محققان مدعو: ۱- آقای دکتر بهزاد برکت ۲- آقای دکتر شاهرخ جهاندار
	زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی	استادیار	
	زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی	استادیار	
	زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی	استادیار	
محل امضاء:			امضاء: نماینده کمیته تحصیلات تکمیلی: آقای دکتر مسعود خلیلی ثابت

- سه نسخه اصل از صورتجلسه توسط نماینده تحصیلات تکمیلی تنظیم و به مدیر گروه تسلیم می شود.

- یک نسخه در گروه آموزشی، یک نسخه در آموزش دانشکده و یک نسخه در اداره دانش آموختگان دانشگاه نگهداری خواهد شد

## Approval

In the Name of God

We hereby certify that we have read this thesis by Shirin Shafiei Ebrahimi, entitled *The Process of Recognizing the Meaning of a Literary Prose Text on the Basis of Discourse*, and that is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Dr M. Hashemi (Supervisor)

Dr Zh. Hassaskhah (Advisor)

Dr B. Barekat (Internal Examiner)

Dr Sh. Jahandar (External Examiner)

January 2009

## **Dedication**

**My Dear Family**, with all my affection, who are the first teachers of my life, for their never-ending moral support and prayers, which always acted as a catalyst in my academic life.

**My English Professors**, for their invaluable helps and insights and the special nature of their tremendous encouragement, support, and patience.

## Acknowledgements

First of all I humbly thank **Allah Almighty**, who gave me health, thoughts, and cooperative people to become successful in the whole of my career.

It could be impossible to accomplish this study without the contribution and support of many kind people to whom I am grateful and sorry that not all can be named here.

I really appreciate my thesis supervisor, **Dr Mansour Hashemi**, to whom my heartfelt thanks go, and also to whom honored me to his great supervision of this study, who was of abundant help and inspiration during the different stages of doing this research, and provided me with valuable sources, and encouragement as well, to proceed the study. Undoubtedly, without his endless patience, guidance, and encouragement, there would be no fruit out of the study. Thanks a million Dr Hashemi.

Equally, I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to **Dr Zhaleh Hassaskhah**, the honorable reader, who provided the invaluable admonitions to complete this study and the one whose cooperations and useful comments enabled me to convert the text to readable English. It could not have been possible to write this thesis perfectly without her great helps. Thank you so very much dear Dr Hassaskhah.

Although to thank those who helped me during the work adequately is impossible, I cannot leave a few others unmentioned. My special thanks are due to **my dear family** for their kind and supportive assistance and also their guidance and encouragements throughout the process of my life and education. I am actually so grateful of all things they did for me, for their endurance throughout my continuing education, for their tolerance of my room full of books and papers here and there, and for their great listening ears. Deepest thanks.

At the end, for sure, responsibilities for the shortcomings of this thesis are mine, and I am truly grateful for what all did for me to complete this work. Many thanks.

Shirin Shafiei Ebrahimi,

January 2009

*We shall have to evolve  
problem solvers galore-  
since each problem we solve  
creates ten problems more.*

*The road to wisdom? - Well, it's plain  
and simple to express:  
Err and err and err again  
but less and less and less.*

*Our choicest plans have fallen through,  
our airiest castles tumbled over,  
because of lines we neatly drew  
and later neatly stumbled over.*

Piet Hein, *Runaway Runes:*  
Short Grooks, I (1968)

## Table of Contents

Title Page.....	II
Approval.....	III
Dedication .....	IV
Acknowledgements .....	V
Table of Contents .....	VII
List of Tables and Figures.....	IX
Abbreviations .....	X
Abstract .....	XI
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
Preliminaries.....	2
1-1 Statement of the Problem.....	7
1-2 Significance of the Study.....	8
1-3 Research Questions .....	9
1-4 Definition of the Key Terms .....	10
1-5 Limitations of the Study.....	11
1-6 Outline of the Study .....	12
CHAPTER TWO.....	12
An Analytical Account of Reading Process in English Studies: Literary Theory and Applied Linguistics .....	12
2-1 Discourse Analysis.....	12
2-2 Hermeneutics .....	21
2-3 Reading .....	24
2-4 Genre.....	41
2-5 Understanding, Interpretation, Criticism, and Theory .....	45
2-6 Meaning .....	64
2-7 Process of Reading and Understanding the Literary Texts.....	76
CHAPTER THREE.....	80



Methodology .....	81
3-1 The Reading Process .....	84
3-2 Understanding a Text .....	85
CHAPTER FOUR .....	91
Conclusion .....	92
4-1 The Process of Reading a Text .....	93
4-2 The Process of Reading a Literary Prose Text .....	97
4-3 Pedagogical Implications .....	100
4-4 Suggestions for Further Research .....	122
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	124
APPENDIX .....	138
The Man with the Scar .....	139
Notes .....	143
چکیده .....	145

## **List of Tables and Figures**

### **List of Tables**

Table Ⅴ. 1: Practical differences between structuralism and post-structuralism	30
Table Ⅴ. 2: Elements of speech event	32
Table Ⅴ. 3: Corresponding scheme of the functions	34
Table 4. 1: Pedagogical implications	107

### **List of Figures**

Figure Ⅴ. 1: Elements concerning discourse	20
Figure Ⅴ. 2: Essential components in reading a literary text	52
Figure Ⅴ. 3: The relationships between literature, literary criticism, and literary theory	58

## **Abbreviations**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

## Abstract

### **The Process of Recognizing the Meaning of a Literary Prose Text on the Basis of Discourse**

**Shirin Shafiei Ebrahimi**

The research area of reading comprehension or textual understanding in a foreign or second language has long attracted the attention of scholars from different perspectives. Their works are concerned with different factors such as the methodologies of textual comprehension of EFL/ESL readers. One of such methodologies recommends reading through discourse. In this regard, there are researchers who have shown interest in investigating the factor of discourse consciousness in the reading process, which is the main part of analytical focus in the present study.

In the first step, this study aims to offer an in-depth analysis of the issue of reading from different viewpoints; then, it concludes that the modern approach suggested for reading is reading through discourse analysis. Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from the text. Reading through discourse analysis is a relevant, disclosing, precise, and efficient way of reading and understanding a text. This study is to investigate how discourse analysis, as expounded in applied linguistics and literary theory, can be applied for construction of meaning in the process of reading a text in English studies. Therefore, as it is the concern of the scholars, what matters in this dissertation is how the reader constructs meaning through or with the text. This application is done by help of a case study on a literary prose text.

Moreover, the present study tries to form an explicative response to the following questions: What happens when a text is read? And how do the readers read and understand the literary prose texts? In this study, "the reader" means every one, who is qualified enough to read and understand the English literary texts, such as the advanced student of English. Although, aims and objectives are harder to specify, the more advanced the language learner becomes, the more competent they become that more usually associated with the native speaker.

A meta-analysis methodology and the library research on literary and linguistic notable works are applied to analyze the meanings of the texts descriptively and critically focusing on literary prose text, the sample is *The Man with the Scar* written by William Somerset Maugham.

The findings provide evidence for the pedagogical value of discourse analysis in reading any genre of texts such as the literary prose; moreover, they present a support for the view that reading involves understanding of discourse. At the end, the researcher suggests some pedagogical hints to facilitate reading process as taught by EFL teachers.

**Key words:** Discourse Analysis, Reading, Understanding, Interpretation, Meaning, Text, Literary Prose

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **PRELIMINARIES**

## Chapter 1

### Preliminaries

This dissertation is a preliminary attempt to consider the relationship between reading in a foreign language and the teaching of literature. It is preliminary because this is an area, which has been neglected in recent discussions of language teaching, while practice has continued to relate the two. Because this is a question which has been little discussed in relation to current language teaching theory, this work will be essentially philosophical and discursive in approach. It will also attempt a consideration of approaches to literature in principle, reduced to basic categories, which may be helpful to teachers to set in context their difficulties of literature in a foreign language.

This dissertation is an analysis of the process of reading a text and understanding the meaning of it, by deliberation on the literary prose. The researcher tries to view the concepts from two underlined perspectives in English studies, namely, literary theory and applied linguistics. The researcher tries her best to investigate the issue by having a detailed study on the works of the most prominent theoreticians and linguists, who always have some valuable words to offer. Some of such authorities are Ferdinand de Saussure, Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, E. D. Hirsch, Michel Foucault, Roman Jakobson, and their unanimous literary men or linguists. Critics like these scholars present ontological debates and make fundamental contributions in the area of reading and understanding the meanings.

In this dissertation, the key concepts of reading and understanding the meanings of the texts, and the related terms in textual criticism are discussed in detail to have a triangulate overview on the concepts.

Since reading is one of the most important skills in language teaching/learning, it becomes as one of the major concerns of this study. Reading is enjoyable and a source of getting information to enlarge knowledge. Reading comprehension of different types of texts by EFL/ESL readers is a research area in SLA that has long absorbed the attention of scholars with

different views. One approach to reading, which is discussed in this research, is reading through discourse analysis.

Sweet and Snow (2003, cited by Shafaghi, 2009, p. 1), explain that reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from text. However, one should not forget that knowledge about the process of reading is needed if he is to move from designing programs based on guess to designing ones that truly meet the needs of the students. Reading is interaction between the reader and the text; this point means that, the reader constructs the meaning based on the interaction between his background knowledge and the reading text. That is, the readers move beyond the word and sentence level to the overall organization and discourse level of the reading. The reader has to have a broader view considering other elements outside the language such as society, history and culture. In addition, the role of context and discourse should not be forgotten in reading process to understand the text more.

Text-linguistics is not a single approach to discourse as an indeterminate set of interests or predispositions (Trappes-Lomax, 2004, p. 139) but includes:

- focus on text, generally defined as language “above,” “beyond” or “longer than” the sentence, and especially on the structure of texts and on their formal (syntactic and lexical), or surface, features. Crystal (1992, p. 106), for example, expresses that discourse analysis is “the study of continuous stretches of language longer than a single sentence” it is also called **discourse linguistics**.
- achievement – and the role of various kinds of lexis in signaling these (Hoey, 1991); on cohesion (e. g. Halliday and Hasan, 1976); on rhetorical patterns of textual meaning such as general-particular and problem-solution (Hoey, 1983, p. 2001); and on text structure seen in terms of hierarchies of textual relationships (Mann and Thompson, 1987).
- a particular concern with the analysis of written texts (for example, Cannon and Johns, 1990; Mann and Thompson, 1992).

In recent views of reading, meaning is created by the reader based on the interaction between his background knowledge and the text. Meaning does not reside in the written material. This is the concern of “schema theory” which assumes when readers start to read, they bring knowledge of their surrounding world and their previous experiences in each word of the text.

According to the views in the area of discourse analysis, meaning is not somewhere in the text which has self-sufficiency from the author or the reader. Today, meaning is considered as a

communicative process in which it is the mind of the reader, which has the great role in making a kind of communication or interaction with the text.

Readers are able to go beyond the word and sentence level to the overall organization and discourse level of the reading because their background knowledge enables them to predict the way in which the writer has organized the material (Carrell, 1984). That is why the study tries to shape its foundations on the concept of discourse and its textual analysis.

Discourse analysis has two branches: One is *conversation analysis* and the other *text linguistics*, which stresses on the abstract structures of the texts and the organization of its different elements and their relationships with each other to make a meaningful unit. Hence, the present researcher tries to apply discourse analysis principles to find out how the reading act develops, this will be recognized with the latter branch of discourse analysis by the end of the study.

One way of reading any kind or genre of texts such as literary prose, which is the concern of this study, is reading through discourse analysis. This method tends to the structure and organization of the text to clear the meaning. The researcher is interested to choose literary prose texts among various types of texts to see how such a text is read through discourse analysis. So, the contribution here is to examine recognizing the meaning of literary prose texts from the discourse analysis perspective, wishing to reach the same achievements as discourse analysis does.

According to Cudden (1984, p. 536) **literary prose** is the “straightforward discourse” which as Abrams (1985, p. 172) explains, “exhibits more patent, though highly diverse, modes of rhythm and other formal features.” Prose study is an area of discussion in history, theory and criticism of non-fictional prose of all periods and genres of all non-fiction, such as autobiography, biography, the sermon, the essay, the letter, the journal, etc. So, an interdisciplinary study has to be done on non-canonical texts and essays on the theory and practice of discourse. In this regard, this piece of research tries to work on the text, in general, and concentrate on literary prose texts, in particular; as Lazar (2005, p. 5-8) demonstrates that literary language has properties, which clearly differentiate literature from other forms of discourse.

The meaning of literature, including the literary prose, resides in the reader’s freedom to respond. Discussion of literature assumes a community of those discussing the literary work. For a reader’s response to be more than idiosyncratic, the reader has to involve in dialogue with other



readers. For a reader's understanding to succeed, it must survive the dialogue of readers continuingly.

Brumfit (2000a, p. 185-86) elaborates that while it is true that there can be no final reading of a literary text, the meaning is always subject to negotiation, for it results from the relationship between readers and the writer, it is none the less possible to make an inappropriate response through a misunderstanding of the codes being operated. Such codes will not be solely linguistic, but will include the interplay of event with event, relationships between characters, exploitation of ideas and value systems, formal structure in terms of a genre or other literary convention, and relationships between any of these and the world outside literature itself. All of such aspects will be subject to convention, and writers will exploit the conventions they inherit differently. A good reader recognizes such conventions and interprets them in relation to the world of other experience which literature must imitate or comment on.

These codes vary in complexity and accessibility. Most works of literature are accessible in terms of plot and relationships between characters, though the fact of such accessibility will lead some writers to insist on falsifying our expectations and deliberately operating with ambiguity and confusion. But certain kinds of interaction, for example with political ideas, will demand sophistication of response in terms of outside understanding of, for example, political theories. Such considerations will force one to consider literature not as an isolated activity but as one to be viewed in relation to the general cognitive development of the reader.

For many, the profound pleasure of reading comes partly from an experience, which is simultaneously individual and communal. One reads alone for much of the time, but he shares the experience not only of the writers but also of other readers with whom he can discuss his reading. Moreover, one does not usually discuss isolated books, and rarely passages of books. One discusses authors against other authors, genres, national traditions, and whole epochs. The response to literature is part of our response to history, to ethics, to politics, to understanding what one is and what other people are. In other words, one does not have knowledge of books; he uses his knowledge; that is the reason of the activeness and commonness of responses.

As stated in Moody (2006), "the model for reading centers less on the transfer of information than on the reader's constructing a dialogic position in relation to the text: reader and writer are engaged in an imaginary conversation with one another." He then continues that the students have to acquire a critical attitude to the texts. "To refer to a text as discourse implies that what is

being read presents not undisputed facts but one side of an imagined conversation in which a reader is interactively engaged.

According to Wolfgang Iser (1978), reading sets in motion a whole chain of activities that depends on both the text and on the exercises of certain human faculties. Effects and responses are a property neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents a potential effect, which is realized during the reading process.

The poles of text, reader and the interaction between them form the ground plan on which the study is built. Iser (1978) assumes that the literary text is a type of communication that encroaches the world on widespread social constructions and other literary works. Such infringements comprises of the reformulation of thought organizations and social structures activated or placed in the text. This reconstruction shows the communicatory purpose of the text whose course is determined in an extended variety of special instructions to the reader (Ibid.).

He then continues that the reader has to accomplish such instructions implicitly and reveals that the meaning of the text is something that he gives to the text. The fundamental process of assembling the meaning is the main point of the process of reading since it engages the reader in a situation that the text is a reaction; so the reader becomes capable of estimating the world enclosed in the text. This process mobilizes and directs the reader's perceptive and imaginative senses.

It is because the imagination, perception and recreation which meanings are set into motion by a piece of literature. If a literary study results from affect of the texts, then there would be no denying of the importance of what happens to the reader of such texts.

In addition, on the area of applied linguistics, Chastain (2006, p. 327) declares that the use of language engages in a process of conversion. While listening or reading, the students receiving the message convert language to thoughts. While speaking or writing they producing the message convert thought to language. The teacher should maximize the amount of class time in which the learners are converting actively language to thoughts, or vice versa, to understand the texts and their meanings more.

Short and Candlin (2000, p. 92) believe that "reference to, and study of, the reading process is an area of common ground for literary criticism, linguistic approaches to literature (stylistics), and also for psycholinguistic studies in language learning". In this regard, the concept of understanding has methodological significance in English literary theory, linguistics, and philosophy of language. In considering the methodology appropriate for the analysis of the

concept of understanding, different possibilities were surveyed by the researcher. A brief review of authoritative works in the field and a number of anthologies showed that the domain of methodology now covered many disciplines of knowledge such as Marxism, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Phenomenology, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics, Psychoanalysis, Postcolonial theory, Feminism, philosophy of science and even Theology. Therefore, there is an *interdisciplinary approach* in conducting further research in this field in general, and in this dissertation, in particular. Some of these available works and chiefly the anthologies make a survey a relatively accessible task. One can read the canonical passages of the works of influential thinkers in a short time.

In the core discussions, a brief overview of a number of the above-mentioned schools of thought is provided to have a better sense of the major discussing concept of the research, which is "understanding." Each views the concept of reading and understanding from a particular perspective, which will be elaborated in the following chapters. In literary theory, such approaches have been developed mainly by individuals with names such as Heidegger, Hegel, Husserl, and many others, whom further will be explained more.

Another key term in the philosophical overview of this study is "interpretation," which is the following function of understanding in the mind of each individual after the act of reading a text. It occurs when the reader is so close to the author's intention from writing that specific text. In interpretation of a text, the intended meaning of the author is tried to be extracted by the reader. It is actually through an understanding of language that this dissertation presents its methodological assumptions and this provides a theoretical position for the future analytical discussions of understanding the meanings of a text.

### **1-1 Statement of the Problem**

A growing body of research has indicated that reading process demands students to move beyond the sentence level. Ibrahim (1979) points out that successful reading involves sentence connections and paragraph organization. According to him, foreign language students lack the experience of identifying the organizational patterns of the passages they are about to read, and they need to acquire them. Clark and Siberstein (1972) consider that the organizational pattern of the passage provides an important clue in deciphering the overall meaning of the text.

A great deal has been done on the area of reading as “reading is the most important foreign language skill” in the view of McDonough and Shaw (2005, p. 89). After all these researches, the problem still exists. The problem is that most readers, who for the purposes of this study are usually the advanced students of English who are qualified enough to read and understand the literary texts, struggle hard to recognize the meanings of the L2 texts, especially the literary ones, even when they are familiar with the meanings of separate words or structures applied in the text.

If the teachers know how the process of understanding a text and the recognition of its meaning occur, then they will find good solutions to help the students read and understand the texts, especially ones with deeper meanings and more complicated structures of the literary texts.

### **1-2 Significance of the Study**

As Brumfit (2000a, p. 184) discusses, all the problems derive from the fact that “recent approaches to language teaching” have ignored literature teaching. So, as the researcher felt a lack on the place of a research on reading literature, she chose the present topic because of a number of reasons: First, reading is the most autonomous and individualizable ability in language work, and literature is a rich and widely-appealing source of material for reading. Second, literature is one of only three areas on which a foreign language content syllabus could be based (the others are linguistics and civilization), which will not conflict with the claims of other subjects in the curriculum. Third, materials are readily available.

A great deal has been written on the significance of any methodological learning or understanding of meaning in the processes of language. On the other hand, the importance of the issue rises when the understanding of meaning goes back to a written text, which has to be read and understood by L2 learners.

Based on what has already been mentioned, this study intends to present an evidence for the view that reading involves understanding of discourse, not knowing the meaning of individual vocabularies or structures. The objective of the study is to see what the process of reading is and how the meaning is comprehended to help the students in their reading comprehension of literary prose texts.

For teachers, knowledge of the components and management of the process of reading is crucial. Without it, they must design reading programs based on intuition and guess about