

REVIEW ARTICLE

Studies on Text World Theory: A Review

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Abstract: Text world theory, which is developed on the basis of cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology, has attracted extensive attention in the fields of linguistics, literature and so on. This study makes a systematic review of the theoretical and empirical studies on text world theory, so as to analyse the current development of text world theory, establish the gaps and provides implications for further research. It can be found that materials involved in the application study of text world theory mainly include novels, poems, plays, films, news discourses and oral dialogues. Text world theory is also applied to the fields like writing and language teaching. As the theoretical framework of text world theory has continually been improving and its application scope been broadening, this study proposes the following suggestions for future studies. As for the theoretical study, it needs to further refine and revise its theoretical framework, and integrate other theories to consolidate its theoretical basis; as for the application study, it needs to expand the scope of the research material, solve the problems of unbalanced research objects and lack of empirical studies. Considering its prominent academic significance in discourse analysis and other related fields, more attention should be paid on the study of text world theory.

Keywords: *Cognition, discourse analysis, review, text world theory*

Introduction

Text world theory, proposed by Paul Werth, (1994, 1995a, 1999) in the second half of the last century and developed by Gavins (2007b,c) has attracted extensive attention in the fields of linguistics, literature and so on. Text world theory draws on a wide range of cognitive, psychological and philosophical approaches to language and conceptualisation in order to present a unified and comprehensive framework for the exploration of communication (Gavins, 2007a). To be specific, it not only offers a means of exploring how a range of contextual factors have the potential to impact upon both the construction and comprehension of a discourse, but also provides a framework through which the precise structure and cognitive effects of individual mental representations can be examined (Gavins, 2007b). Based on that, text world theory is strongly applicable to the field of discourse analysis.

This study makes a systematic review of the theoretical and empirical studies on text world theory, to analyse the current development of text world

theory, establish the gaps and provides implications for further research.

Theoretical Studies on Text World Theory

Werth's Proposition of Text World Theory

Text world theory involves a cognitive approach to discourse, which is developed based on cognitive linguistics, cognitive psychology, etc. It is closely related to mental space theory proposed by Fauconnier, (1985). Based on mental space theory, many cognitive linguists have realized that when human beings interpret texts, they will establish mental representation of the text in their minds. Among them, Paul Werth applied this concept to the interpretation of literary texts as well as non-literary texts and then proposed text world theory. Therefore, text world theory can be seen as the development of mental space theory to some extent. Specifically, text world theory employs the notion of mental spaces or "worlds" that are "text-driven" (Werth, 1999); that is,

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they are derived from the propositions in a text established through deictic parameters and referential elements.

Paul Werth began formulating the text-world framework in the late 1980s and early 1990s and published its outline in a series of articles during this period (Werth, 1994, 1995a, b). His monograph *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* (1999), which was compiled and published by Professor Mick Short of Lancaster University after his death, can be regarded as the foundation of the text world theory.

According to Werth (1999), all discourse situations could be divided into three manageable levels of conceptual activity, that is, the discourse-world, the text-world and the sub-world. The first level is the discourse world, which is the broadest level, consisting of “the situational context surrounding the speech event itself” (Werth, 1999). The context includes both the immediate physical context perceived directly by the participants in the communicative situation and the set of beliefs, dreams, memories and, in general terms, the knowledge that the participants bring into the speech event (Werth, 1995a). As the participants communicate, they create richly detailed mental representations, or text-worlds, of the discourse in their minds, which is the second level. A text-world is “the situation depicted by the discourse”, a conceptual space that is constructed between the author and reader (Werth, 1995a). Within the text world there may be different degrees of layering corresponding to subworlds, which have the general function of altering parameters introduced in the text world, which is the third level. The sub-world takes the form of a departure from the parameters of the matrix text world (Werth, 1999). There are three types of sub-worlds (Werth, 1999):

- a. deictic sub-worlds: departures from the basic deictic ‘signature’ of the conceptual world, e.g., ‘flashbacks’, direct speech, ‘windows’ onto other scenes.
- b. attitudinal sub-worlds: notions entertained by the protagonists, as opposed to actions undertaken by the protagonists in the discourse.
- c. epistemic sub-worlds: modalized propositions expressed by participants or characters. They include hypothetical worlds and modal worlds.

In general, Werth’s text world theory explains the relationship between language and conceptualization and provides insight into the mental process of human

communication, including online production and reception of text, psychological representation of text, management of the conceptual structure of text by human brain, and the role of various contextual factors in language communication in text cognitive processing.

Gavins *et al.*’s Development of Text World Theory

After Werth’s death, with the publication of his monograph, scholars in relevant fields recognized the importance of text world theory for discourse analysis, and they developed this theory to increase its applicability (Hidalgo-Downing, 2000b, a, 2002, Gavins and White, 2003, Gavins, 2005, 2007b). Among them, Joanna Gavins has made the greatest contribution to the development of text world theory.

Critically inheriting Werth’s theory, Gavins further modified text world theory in several aspects. For example, (Gavins, 2005) examined the text-worlds created by the presence of modalized propositions in literary fiction and proposed several modifications. Gavins questioned Werth’s explanation of modality and used Simpson, (1993) modal grammar of narrative fiction to formulate a refined text-world account of the conceptual structure of modalized propositions. Based on these modifications, (Gavins, 2007c) published the most important text world theory monograph: *The Text World Theory: An Introduction*, which is a more comprehensive and comprehensible introduction of text world theory. In this more condensed work, Gavins reconstructed Werth’s theory to make it more consistent and provided a wider variety of text world communication and thus expanded its applicability.

The basic theory of Gavins’s version and Werth’s original proposition remains similar. To be specific, both insist on the dual origin of the text world, that is, they believe that the text world originates not only from the internal attributes of the text or discourse, but also from the mental representation of the participants in understanding the text or discourse. What mainly distinguishes Gavins’s modification from Werth’s proposition is the specific division of the world. Werth describes the world created by the first-person narration as follows: within the discourse world of the author and the reader, in first-person narrations there is an “envelope world” (text-world 1) where the persona figure tells his or her story. The story (text world 2) is itself embedded within the envelope world of text world 1. The persona is both a character within text world 2 and a narrator in text world 1. Therefore, the persona gets the responsibility for the story world, while the author simply has responsibility for the envelope world in which the persona is located

(Werth, 1999). Werth did not distinguish between the author and the narrator in the third-person narration, while Gavins distinguishes between the author and the narrator in the first and third person narrations. Gavins, (2007c) believes that in all narrative models, the author is a real-world discourse participant, and the narrator is an entity in the text world created by the author of the text world, which is the construction of the text world. The narrator exists in the text world, and the text world where the narrator lives is a core world, from which all other worlds generated. Gavins, (2007c) does not recognize Werth's classification, and redefines and classifies the sub-world by replacing "sub-world" with "world-switch". Gavins points out that the prefix "sub" of "sub-world" implies that the newly generated text world is attached to the original text world, which is easy to cause ambiguity, while "world-switch" can more accurately express the meaning of the new text world generated by the change of space-time boundary. Moreover, Gavins believes that the concepts of the two sub-categories of Werth's sub-world, namely, attitudinal sub-world and epistemic sub-world, overlap with each other (Gavins, 2005). Gavins directly summarizes them as "modal-world" which could be re-divided into "deontic modal-world," "boulomaic modal-world" and "epistemic modal-world". Another difference is embodied in the way they treat "negation". In Werth's model, negation may be described as an epistemic "sub-world" since it involves a change of world definition through deletion (Werth, 1999). In Gavins's model, various types of "negative world" may be created, for example, a negative epistemic modal-world may be created, where a character believes that another character does not wish they do harm when in fact they do. The blended world is also Gavins' innovation to text world that incorporates the concept of blending from conceptual integration theory.

Liang and Liu, (2009) think that text world theory is not perfect at the level of categorization: there is no unified and clear defining standard for the division of each level. To improve the practicability of text world theory in discourse analysis, there should be a unified and reasonable defining standard of the core level of text world. They believe that the text world should first be the world of characters, which is a space that readers or participants will actively construct once they contact the text or discourse, rather than the world where the narrator is, as Gavins thought. The text world is the space where the characters in the text act and think, not the space of the narrator or the inner space of the characters. In a text, the narrator is in a quasi-discourse world, and the space where the reader acts or thinks for the characters constructs a text world.

The inner monologue enters the sub-world just like free direct speech and free direct thought.

In addition, when introducing text world theory, Gavins used several types of material, including not only literary texts, but also non-literary texts such as advertisements, political speeches, etc.; including not only written texts, but also spoken texts such as audio recording and interview recording. Although Werth's analyses were confined to realist fictional narratives, he claimed to have devised in the theory a framework capable of accounting for all discourse types (Werth, 1999). Gavins' enrichment of the types of material verified the applicability of text world theory, which strongly prove that it could truly explain the cognitive processing of all forms of human communication, as Werth originally claimed.

Then, Joanna Gavins and Ernestine Lahey edited the book *World Building: Discourse in the Mind* (2016), which further developed text world theory. Generally inheriting the theoretical framework of Werth, (1999) and (Gavins, 2007c) it makes breakthroughs and innovations in theory. For example, Lahey, (2016) questioned the applicability of the notion of the "empty" text-world in cases of fixed focalization. Current text world theory suggests that the effect of fixed internal focalization is the formation of an epistemic modal focalization-world which serves as the matrix world from which all other worlds in the network derive (Gavins, 2001, Lahey, 2004). All world-building and function-advancing propositions are provided via this focalization-world, rendering the text-world level redundant, or 'empty'. However, Lahey, (2016) suggested a rethinking of the role of empty text-worlds in the context of speech and thought presentation. Specifically, Lahey argued that where speech and thought presentation indicate a level of reliability greater than that afforded to the matrix focalization-world, the deictic and epistemic modal-worlds prompted by speech and thought would be anchored in the backgrounded 'empty' text-world. Second, Lahey argued that the construction of text-worlds influences the construction of the discourse-worlds which surround them. Such upward influence from the text-world to the discourse-world level is not predicted by contemporary text world theory, in which the text-world is always considered to be a product of the discourse-world, rather than an element in its formation. Through the analysis of drama, Gibbons also contributed to the theoretical development of text world theory. Gibbons, (2016) pointed out that conceptual integration theory in cognitive linguistics is also one of the important ways to construct the text world by analysing the performance of experimental drama. Using Gavins, (2007b) adaptation of blending

for text world theory in the form of the blended-world, Gibbons proved that a text world theory account of conceptual integration provides a more nuanced understanding of the ontological dynamics of immersive theatre. In addition, Browse, (2016) pointed out the theoretical relationship between the text world and metaphor by discussing the early embryonic form of the text world theory and the later classical model, and consolidated the theoretical foundation of the text world itself. Generally, the book further proves that text world theory can promote its own development by absorbing theories from other disciplines, laying a foundation for the integration of text world theory and other theories.

Comparison Between Text World Theory and Other Related Theories

Some scholars discussed the similarities and differences between text world theory and other related theories, especially text world theory and other “world” theories, such as mental space theory, possible world theory, contextual frame theory, deictic shift theory such as Chen, (2016) and McLoughlin, (2016).

First, text world theory is an extension of mental space theory. Text world theory has successfully overcome the defect of mental space theory that there is no theory about the composition of space (Werth, 1999). It pays attention not only to readers’ construction of various mental spaces and their interrelationships in literary texts, but also to the physical space of readers. Secondly, there are many similarities between text world theory and possible world theory, while the latter focuses on the propositional logic, internal structure, and characteristics of the fictional world, and cannot explain the complex process of human cognition and discourse processing. What is totally different from text world theory is that the text world explains the construction of the conceptual world by the communicators in the process of text production and reception. Therefore, different from the possible world that simplifies the basic content of the world for the purpose of logical formalization, the text world is a “rich” world, which is constructed by people in direct experience of the real world and interaction with the real world (Werth, 1999). Moreover, text world theory and contextual frame theory are almost developed at the same time, having a lot of similarities (Werth, 1999). For example, both focus on discourse comprehension rather than isolated sentences; both consider psychological representations as the centre of language understanding and believe that these psychological representations are formed through the interaction between textual clues and the reader’s

knowledge and reasoning. However, contextual frame theory does not consider the context of text communication, while text world theory not only focuses on the mental representation of the text, but also on the context of text communication (Werth, 1999, Gavins, 2007b). Finally, there are many similarities between text world theory and deictic shift theory. For example, both involve the cognitive construction of the projected meaning of the text, describing the process of readers’ understanding of the text; both focus on how readers engage in psychological transformation within rich and complex psychological representations; both pay attention to the discourse and text worlds of literary communication, which is missing from the contextual framework theory. However, deictic shift theory emphasizes the shift of deixis and focuses on the perspective of readers, while text world theory focuses more on the rich mental representation of readers and describes the whole process of reading in detail (Chen, 2016).

Text world theory provides a systematic and multi-level analysis of the rich conceptual representations in the process of text construction, and it believes that readers extract their contextual and experiential knowledge through text-driven principles, which is the biggest difference and obvious advantage compared to other “world” theories. It not only describes the internal context of the text but also focuses on the communicative context of the reader’s world, which could describe the degree of reader involvement and emotional reactions in text processing (Chen, 2016). Compared with other relevant theories, text world theory pays more attention to the mental representation of readers, the context of discourse communication and the emotional experience of the text, making it more universal and suitable for analysing literary texts.

In addition, McLoughlin, (2016) examined the theoretical crossing points between text world theory and Stockwell’s (Stockwell, 2009, 2011) model of literary resonance. Text world theory and model of literary resonance act as complementary ways of analysing the cognitive effects of imagined movements in time and space which are created in the mind of a reader by the experience of reading a literary text. Text world theory offers a way of analysing the structural relations of the various worlds within a text and identifying the linguistic cues and structures that cause them to come into being. What Stockwell’s model adds is a way of seeing these structures and movements between them in dynamic relation through the monitoring of attentional focus, and how that changes, and why it changes, as the reader progresses

through the text. This enriches the analysis of texts by adding a “real time” aspect to the analysis that captures the very fluid movements between text-worlds, and mechanisms by which these worlds may change in terms of their attentional relation, moving forward and back in the reader’s attentional focus, and in some cases, being reactivated several times after periods of occlusion and decay. Text world theory offers a way of approaching the spatial and material aspects of imaginative movement and mobile sense-making, while the resonance model offers a way of integrating the temporal aspects with the spatial and material, to produce a deeper and more three-dimensional analytical model for understanding the sense-making mechanisms of the reader.

Empirical Studies on Text World Theory

After being proposed by Paul Werth, the text-world model has been used for analysing all types of literary and non-literary discourses. The literary genres mainly include poetry, drama and narratives; the non-literary genres mainly include advertising discourse and political discourse. This wide-ranging application of text world theory leads to some important modifications to the theory. For example, Lugea, (2016) argued that in spite of the claim of Werth, (1999), “the framework is applicable to all text types – spoken and written – his development and description of it is mostly based on literary prose”. In her application of the text-world framework to the analysis of Spanish and English spoken narratives, Lugea explained that although Werth presents text world theory as a holistic approach to all kinds of discourse, “he makes no mention of how it can be used to analyse a language other than English.

At present, the materials involved in the application of text world theory mainly include novels, poems, plays, films, news discourses, oral dialogues, etc. In addition, it is also applied to writing, language teaching and other fields.

Literary Discourse Analysis Based on Text World Theory

Text world theory is mainly used to analyse various literary texts, among which novels are the most common. Hidalgo Downing published the first article on the application of text world theory to analyse literary works. Hidalgo-Downing, (2000a) presented a discourse-based approach to negation by applying text world theory to the analysis of negation in the novel *Catch-22*. The model developed for the analysis of negation is based on Werth’s (1999) notion of negation as a subworld which modifies information

which is present in the common ground of the discourse. By so doing, negation contributes to the general discourse function of updating information in the text world. Then Bridgeman and Hoover also published articles on analysing novels with text world theory. Drawing on and developing particular aspects of Werth’s cognitive work on text worlds, Bridgeman, (2001) considered how interpersonal parameters were constructed in reading and their relationship to generic schemata, examined how two novels, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, reworked the parameters of the relationship between author and audience through moves which resembled patterns of negotiation described in pragmatic accounts of conversational interactions. Hoover, (2004) used text alteration to illuminate literary style, the creation of the fictional world within literary texts, and the connections between textual features and interpretation. Through the analysis of Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*, it argued that altering texts can help us to understand text world creation and mind style. Gavins and White, (2003) (employed text world theory as a means of exploring the precise nature of the fictional worlds created by the absurd adaption with the analysis of Barthelme’s *Snow White*. The text world theory analysis of *Snow White* has shown how Barthelme’s readers are provided with only minimal world-building information on which to base their mental representations of the text. Critically using text world theory as an analytic tool, Lahey, (2016) primarily explored the stylistics of *ethos* construction in Brown’s novels. It suggests that where particularly salient correspondences exist between real-life authors and their fictional characters, this mapping may form a critical component of readers’ construction of an author’s *ethos*. Combining text world theory with Stockwell’s (2009) ‘attention-resonance’ model, Whiteley, (2016) examined the ways in which an excerpt from *The Unconsoled* manipulates reader attention and interacts with reader expectations in a manner which makes it potentially highly resonant, demonstrating that text world theory is a profitable framework within which to examine the experiential aspects of literary reading. Applying text world theory to *Found Objects*, the first chapter of the novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Jia and Zhang, (2013) explained the way readers mentally construct text-world and various sub-worlds when reading it, so as to communicate with Egan who is spatially and culturally distant.

Ma Juling made a series of studies on novels based on text world theory, such as: 1) describing the cognitive mechanism of black humour fictions, accounting for how their idiosyncrasy and absurdity are generated in readers’ text processing and in the fictional characters’

perception of the actual text world Ma, (2008) discussing the literary narrative, fictional thinking of characters and emotional effects in literary aesthetics by analysing the three representative works of black humour fictions (Ma, 2008).

In addition to novels, poetry is one of the most common literary texts analysed within text world theory. Gavins, (2007a) and McIntyre and Deixis, (2007), the early scholars who applied text world theory to poetry analysis, discussed the text world construction of readers in the process of reading poetry. In recent years, there are also many articles that use text world theory to analyse poetry. Stockwell, (2016) analysed the stylistic features of the deixis in poetry, and found that the deixis in poetry successfully transferred the poet's feelings to the readers by constantly changing the deictic objects, while the readers also constructed the author's thoughts in the construction and transformation of the text world. Harbus, (2016) found by analysing the narrative poem *Beowulf* that the time span between a literary work and a real reader does not affect the reader's reading experience, because the reader's feelings for the work mainly depend on the construction of the text world and the transformation between the text worlds. Applying a cognitive poetic framework constructed from text world theory and Stockwell's (2009, 2011) model of literary resonance, McLoughlin, (2016) demonstrated how such a framework may elucidate the ways in which poetry can address the new mobilities paradigm's concerns and questions regarding the infrastructures of imaginative travel, and how these may be mobilized, or performed, through ongoing sociotechnical and cultural practices. The framework provides a way to describe, analyse and understand how poetry collapses boundaries between then and now, and between here and there, making them co-present. Zou, (2021) pointed out that Robert Frost's poems can be simplified by using text world theory as an analysis tool and the hidden themes can be revealed accordingly. In Frost's poems, the dual sources of text worlds' production determine the heteronomous principle in the interpretation of the poetic themes. The interpretation, as an interaction between readers and the poet across time and space, should cover the innate attributes as well as the external elements in the production of the text worlds.

Some scholars have explored the feasibility of applying text world theory to drama analysis. Cruickshank and Lahey, (2010) presented an augmented TWT better capable of handling the challenges associated with the analysis of drama based on one text – Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. They pointed out that readers

of play-texts process drama as series of theatrical and fictional signals. These signals in turn prompt the construction and elaboration of two distinct types of text-world spaces: staged worlds and fictional worlds. They introduced two new world types into the framework to make the theory better explain dramatic texts. Based on Cruickshank and Lahey, (2010)'s discussion, Gibbons, (2016) advanced the capabilities of text world theory in relation to theatre and performance by investigating the textual mechanisms employed to promote immersion and how such mechanisms position audience members in relation to text-worlds they are invited to explore physically. Focusing on Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*, one of the immersive narratives, Gibbons, (2016) demonstrated the value of text world theory in explicating the ontological world relations of performance, developed Cruickshank and Lahey's concept of the staged world by suggesting that it shifts its ontological foundations in context: it is a text-world construct in the reading of a play-text but a discourse-world frame in performance. Using text world theory in conjunction with other stylistic models to analyse an absurd drama called *You and Me*, Lugea, (2016) found that text world theory could tease out the layers at which realistic and absurd features operate, in order to account for the co-existence of an absurd aesthetic and a realistic representation of a bilingual senile mind style. With Arthur Miller's memory plays *Death of a Salesman* and *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*, Fang, (2016) demonstrated that the application of text world theory can provide multilayered and more precise insights into the dynamicity of contexts and the resultant vacillation of personalities.

Besides, some scholars try to use text world theory to analyse biographies. (Jian and Xiao, 2021) pointed out that the biographical art of *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen* is mainly manifested in the construction of three different text worlds, namely, the construction of discourse world with historical narration as the main narrative strategy to guarantee the reliability of the biography; the construction of the text world with the third-person narration of omniscience as the main narrative strategy to guarantee the accessibility of the readers; the construction of the sub-text world with the horizontal narration as the main narrative strategy to guarantee the readability of the biography.

Non-literary Discourse Analysis Based on Text World Theory

Text world theory can be used to analyse not only literary texts, but also non-literary texts. At present, scholars have studied films, oral dialogues, newspaper reviews, etc. At first, Werth, (1999) illustrated that text

world theory was applicable to the text analysis of other media by taking Robert Wiene's film *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligarias* as an example. Later, Liu and Pang, (2011) applied text world theory to examine the problem of schizophrenic garden-path narration. Taking the film *A Beautiful Mind* as an example, they explored the problem from the perspective of cinematic narrative, that is, the dynamic decoding process and cognitive effect of cinematic narration. Then, taking text world theory as a starting point, Van der Bom, (2016) analysed face-to-face interview discourse, offered a text-worlds approach to the study of linguistic identity in discursive interaction, suggested that the text-worlds framework offered a means of systematically exploring linguistic self-representation, and was able to account for how identity can be achieved and negotiated in interactional discourse. Browse, (2016) used text world theory to present a situated analysis of metaphor in two op-ed articles about the 2008 financial crisis, focusing on the rhetorical effects produced by the interaction of metaphor with the conceptual structures cued by the text. Browse pointed out that text world theory is a useful framework for doing such a situated analysis because it offers a means of describing this conceptual context and the more "subtle conceptual effects" (Werth, 1994) generated by metaphor in a particular instance of use.

Other Application Studies of Text World Theory

In addition to being a theoretical tool for stylistics and discourse analysis, text world theory is also applied to language teaching, writing and other fields of applied linguistics. Drawing on Halliday, (2002)'s notion of "grammatics" as a way of using knowledge about language "to think with", Giovanelli, (2016) argued that teachers can exploit text world theory's position as a cognitive discourse grammar to design meaningful tasks and activities that are mindful of the discourse strategies and resources that students use when reading. Since text world theory is fundamentally a reader-response theory, Giovanelli argued that it ought to sit comfortably within secondary teachers' own philosophical and pedagogical belief systems, and has the potential to provide a richer, more nuanced perspective on how students engage in the process of reading texts.

Mohammadzadeh, (2017) attempted to examine how the stylistic aspects of text world theory can be used in Literature and Language Teaching classrooms 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.

Scott, (2016) applied text world theory to creative writing, pointing the way towards a principled and rigorous reflection on creative practice based on linguistic conceptions of worldbuilding. Writers may use text world theory to interrogate and itemize the internal coherence of individual text-worlds, for example, ensuring a consistency and acceptability of point of view, checking how much a character knows or does not know about another character or situation, or tracking the progression and consistency of narratives with complex structures. Scott, (2016) also pointed out that text world theory might also be put to service in revealing how multiple text-worlds interact with one another and how this interaction can be used, for example, to enhance themes or emphasize dramatic irony. It should also help creative writers understand the complex but fundamental relationship between discourse, imagination and the worlds that are built in the interaction between the two.

Recommendations for Future Study of Text World Theory

Theoretical Development of Text World Theory

Since text world theory is still under development, future studies need to further refine and improve its theoretical framework. For example, the division of the sub-world is not clear and unified enough. Sometimes it is difficult to determine the status and nature of a world (such as free indirect speech), or to distinguish the boundaries between different levels of the world (especially in film text) (Liu and Pang, 2011). Therefore, it should further clarify the concept and classification of text world and sub-world, in which process the relevant achievements of other "world" theories would be helpful to improve text world theory. Gavins (Gavins, 2007b) has developed text world theory using some concepts of contextual frame theory, such as role and frame shifting, which is called "world switch" in text world theory. The further study could develop text world theory by combining more relevant concepts of other "world" theories and absorbing the latest research results of other "world" theories.

Integration of Text World Theory and Other Theories

In addition to the revision and improvement of its own theory, text world theory also needs to integrate other theories to consolidate its theoretical basis. Firstly, the

text world is closely related to the experiential philosophy of cognitive linguistics. Gavins, (2007c) once discussed the concepts of embodied experience and embodied conceptual system, but the connotation of this relationship has not attracted much attention (Yan and Lan, 2020). Secondly, previous studies have shown that conceptual metaphor and text world theory are compatible (Browse, 2016). Therefore, future studies can clarify the relationship between text world, conceptual metaphor and conceptual integration theory with the ontological research of cognitive linguistics, so as to build a more unified theoretical system of text world.

Furthermore, Gavins, (2007b) once integrated text world theory with the transitivity system of systemic functional linguistics to discuss how people conceptualize the actions and events in a text and the relationship between them, as well as the construction elements of the text world. It is also worth considering whether other concepts and models in systemic functional linguistics can be applied to the improvement of text world theory. Therefore, future study could employ the research results of functional linguistics, rhetoric or other related disciplines to improve text world theory.

Expansion of the Application Scope of Text World Theory

Similar to other cognitive poetics studies, text world theory lacks the empirical support, having a specific preference in research objects and methods. Text world theory is originally oriented to analyse texts of various genres. However, most of the existed studies have focused on the analysis of novels, poems and dramas of literary texts, while few have been involved in other types of texts. Therefore, more empirical studies involving the analysis of other types of texts are expected to be carried out to further verify the applicability of text world theory. Moreover, though text world theory can be used to analyse not only written texts, but also spoken texts, few studies have been conducted on the analysis of oral discourse. The further studies need to solve the problem of genre imbalance of the research material and pay more attention to other non-literary texts and oral texts, so as to provide more favourable support for this theory. For example, researchers could apply text world theory to the analysis of news discourse, political discourse, and even further explore the possibility of applying it to critical discourse study. Besides, based on the existing studies, it needs to explore how to better apply text world theory to language teaching, creative writing and other fields, so as to expand its application scope.

Conclusion

This article systematically reviews the theoretical and empirical studies of text world theory, to analyse the current development of text world theory, and then make some recommendations for future research. It can be seen that the theoretical framework of text world theory has continually been improving, and its application scope been broadening, yet there still exists space for improvement.

As for the theoretical study, the theory itself is not so perfect enough that it needs to be further refined and revise its theoretical framework and integrate other theories to consolidate its theoretical basis. It would benefit from the theory of cognitive linguistics and systemic functional linguistics. As for the application study, it needs to expand the scope of the research material, solve the problems of unbalanced research objects and lack of empirical studies. The further research could pay more attention to non-literary texts or oral texts and further employ text world theory to the fields like language teaching and creative writing. In conclusion, considering the prominent academic significance of text world theory for discourse analysis and the other related fields, more attention should be paid on the study of text world theory.

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