Genre

Mental representations in text comprehension

- Aim of research in mental structures and their role in reading and listening was to devise artificially intelligent computer programmes which might imitate human behaviour.

- Computers still cannot fully imitate human text comprehension.

- Comprehension cannot be described simply as a matter of decoding words and grammar from the page in some sort of direct and automatic way.

- Mental structures must exist in order for us to understand texts.

Concepts and mental models

- Concept = mental entity
- Cat, chair (slightly different mental concepts of each object)
- "It is cold with that *window* open"
- We must have in our mind some 'concept' of a window which tells us what it is physically, and also tells us what it does.
- Skemp (1979) suggests that concepts group together in our minds to form 'mental models', which are similar to maps, diagrams and anatomical drawings.

Example Page (38)

- What is a concept?
- A mental entity (e.g. ticket office) is called a *concept*
- *What is a mental model?*
- A mental model is made up of a number of interconnected concepts, is a conceptual structure.
- What is **abstraction**?
- The process by which certain qualities of actual objects and events are internalized as concepts, while others are ignored.

Concepts are fuzzy

- What is a bird?
- Mental concepts are 'fuzzy', and not fixed and clear.
- Prototypes: are clear examples which fit all features (like eagles)
- Some non prototypical examples lack one or more defining features (such as the ability to fly).
- The importance of this for texts and discourse is that when we are confronted with a particular text it is probable that a similar mental operation occurs. We probably evaluate that text with reference to our prototypical concept of one **genre** or another.

Combining concepts

- Concepts can combine in our minds to give larger conceptual structures (mental models).

- Mental models can be:

1. Physical entities (such as railway stations)

2. Abstract things (management structure in a company).

Schemas

- Sometimes called 'schemata' refer to clusters of mental concepts which we draw on in order to interpret the world around us and also to interpret language.

- A schema can be defined as 'a set of interrelated features which we associate with an entity or a concept.

- All these **mental structures** (concepts, schemas, and mental models) are important to interpret texts.

Frames and scripts

- (see example on page 41)
- All the elements of schema are available here in terms of content. The social roles are as expected (waiter, customer) as other elements (food, bill)
- What is unexpected is the order of the events.

Kinds of schema

- Two types of information stored:
1. Sequentially (in a sort of narrative and stored as a **script**). A **script** refers to a conventionally ordered information.
2. Non sequentially (stored as a frame). *A frame* can be reserved for non-sequentially ordered information.

Schemas in the comprehension process

- Our mental schemas set up expectations which help us to predict what we will find in any new situation, and scripts help us to predict what will happen next.

Text schemas and genre schemas

- Types of schema:
1. World knowledge: including encyclopedic knowledge and previous knowledge of the speaker or writer. This helps us to construct a content schema for a text.
2. Knowledge built up from the text so far: a current meaning representation.
3. Previous experience of this type of text (a text schema).

Genre expectations

- What do you expect from a car advert?
- Genres are ideal whereas texts are actual.
- Genre knowledge is related to intertextuality because it concerns the relation between one text and other texts.

Classifying and sorting genres

- Texts can be sorted into clearly defined groups such as fiction, poetry, drama and so on.

- These can be sorted into subgroups as romantic fiction, cowboy fiction and so on.

- The classifying approach to genre has been common and valuable in literary analysis and in practical contexts such as libraries and bookshops.

- Unger discusses different criteria to classify genres:

1. Aspects of the situation in which the genre occurs (such as the number of speakers or their social rank).

2. Mode (written or spoken)

3. Purpose of genre. (genres are guided by purposes or functions which they are intended to fulfil.

Applied genre theory

- Macro-genres: include narrative and exposition
- Bhatia's (2002) to analysis consists of three levels:
  1. Generic values such as narration, description, explanation and persuasion.
  2. Genre colonies are constellations of genres across genre boundaries serving broadly similar communicative purposes.
  3. Genres themselves for examples advertisements.

Genre, style, register and jargon

- **_Style_**: refers to the general way in which language is used in any written or spoken text (formal or informal).
- **_Register_** is used to describe the more formal legal style for example; a set of specialized vocabulary and preferred syntactic structures used by specific socio-professional groups for special purposes.
- **_Jargon_**: refers specifically to lexis which is used in particular, usually professional domains, such as legal jargon, medical jargon, and cooking jargon.