Review of Charles R. Cooper and Sydney Greenbaum, (eds.) Studying Writing: Linguistic Approaches

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This volume is the first in what is to be a series from Sage on "topics within the interdisciplinary field of written communication." This book describes work by discourse analysts, cognitive theorists, and one philologist, all of which bears on the study of writing. As is the case with any edited volume of papers, the chapters in the book vary widely in their aims and scopes, and while all are worth reading, some are considerably easier to make sense of than others. In what follows, I will first summarize each chapter and then make some more general comments about the volume as a whole.

In "Writing in the Perspective of Speaking," Wallace Chafe discusses "constraints inherent in the circumstances of speaking but absent from those of writing." Using samples of writing and speaking from the same individual, Chafe shows that written "punctuation units" (units separated by periods, commas, or other marks of punctuation) roughly correspond to the intonational units of spoken discourse: spurts of language of roughly five words, or two seconds, that express what is currently active in a speaker's consciousness. Writers, however, are freer than speakers are to make use of discontinuous units (units in which other units are embedded), and to produce longer units. While speakers usually produce only one new clause at a time, and while spoken clauses usually express already familiar information in their subjects, writers are not always constrained in these ways. Written discourse tends to contain more units which are subordinate to others, as well as more varied vocabulary, more explicit pronouns, and fewer tentative "hedges." All of these differences have to do with the facts that writers produce and readers interpret discourse more slowly than do speakers and hearers, and that writing is typically more detached and less focused on interpersonal involvement than is speaking.

The chapter by Jan Firths, "On the Dynamics of Written Communication in the Light of the Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective," is one of the more difficult in the volume. Firths attempts to summarize a great deal of very technical material. Very briefly, Functional Sentence Perspective, or FSP, is an approach to grammar which
examines how ideas are differentially encoded in sentences according to how central each idea is to the new material the sentence is intended to express. In general, the final elements in a sentence tend to be the most important, or "rhematic" ones, and the elements at the beginning "thematic," expressing shared or background information, though various factors can interfere with this pattern of organization. Text analysis based on FSP can show when and how complexes of thematic and rhematic material are semantically homogeneous throughout a text.

In "Given and New Information and Some Aspects of the Structures, Semantics, and Pragmatics of Written Texts," William J. Vande Kopple shows how research based on FSP can be used prescriptively, to suggest how writers should organize sentences in English. Vande Kopple provides a useful summary of FSP and then describes research which shows that "paragraphs following the given-before-new sequence [are] significantly more readable and memorable than their variants" (86). He suggests that students should be taught to recognize and manipulate given and new information and should try to put given before new information, other things being equal.

Stephen P. Witte and Roger D. Cherry discuss "Writing Processes and Written Products in Composition Research." They claim that, contrary to recent opinion in composition theory, written products can shed light on the processes by which they were composed. In particular, they show how a writer's choice of sentence topics for a finished text reflects the decisions he or she has made about framing in the process of composing; writers who conceptualize their tasks in different ways use different patterns of topicalization.

In the next selection, "New Schemata," Teun van Dijk claims that reporters organize and readers interpret news articles by means of a cognitive schema or superstructure which involves, among other things, a recency principle of most important information first. Historical, contextual, and evaluative information about each event follows, in the underlying schema and usually in its surface realization as well.

Michael Hoey seems to be talking about something much like van Dijk's discourse schemata in his chapter, "Overlapping Patterns of Discourse Organization and Their Implications for Clause Relational Analysis in Problem-Solution Texts." It is not entirely clear from Hoey's presentation what "clause relational analysis" is, but it appears to have to do with the strategies readers use for deciding how sentences
that occur together in a text are related to one another, either sequentially or logically. Sets of relationships among contiguous sentences form patterns, one of which is the problem-solution pattern. This pattern turns out to be similar to patterns for question-answer and hypothetical-real texts.

In "The Discourse Status of Commentary," Biblical philologist Chaim Rabin suggests that the role of the commentator on a text is to prevent difficulties which are the result of "disturbances in the communicative contact between the text and the reader" (223). Disturbances are caused by differences in expectations: an archaic text (and by implication any text) may reflect unfamiliar expectations of writer-reader relationships. The commentator thus takes the place of the original speaker or writer of the text.

The final chapter in the volume is "Cognitive Models and Discourse Analysis," by Carl H. Fredericksen. Fredericksen's contribution is highly technical, but it provides an interesting overview of work in cognitive theory on models of discourse representation. Theories about how readers use contextual inferences to construct representations as they read may be "text-based," focusing on how textual features cue inferences, or "knowledge-based," focusing on the cognitive schemata, frames, or scripts which readers use to make inferences. Fredericksen proposes, with many others, that there are multiple levels and types of representations for discourse; readers make use of various kinds of inferences of both sorts. In this article, though, he focuses on conceptual structures, describing parts of a grammar explicit enough to allow a machine to make correct interpretations of the propositional and frame structure of a text. In the final section of the chapter, he discusses research with children that shows that some kinds of frame structures, such as narrative, are easier to recall and manipulate than others.

It is unlikely that anyone except a reviewer would find much reason to read all the articles in this volume in sequence. It is a frustratingly disparate set: several rather different approaches to discourse are represented, and different authors seem to have different audiences in mind. The intended audience for the volume as a whole is composition theorists, but many of the selections presuppose more prior knowledge of linguistics than many composition theorists are likely to possess, while others seem self-evident. One reason for this may be that the potential scope of a volume called *Studying Writing: Linguistic Approaches* is extremely broad. Writing is language use, and the linguistic study of writing can and does draw upon
any of the numerous theories and techniques of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. And while all the authors represented here examine or at least make reference to written discourse, what they have to say applies equally to discourse in any other mode. This is as it should be: while writing is a slower process and allows for more editing than speaking, the creation and interpretation of written texts takes place in the same way as does the creation and interpretation of any mode of discourse. All students of discourse, composition theorists and linguists alike, need to be thinking about the issues discussed in this volume: about how grammar functions metalingually to indicate what language-users are doing as they do it, and about how cognitive frames or schemata get referred to as discourse is processed.

The approaches discussed in this volume all deserve to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, because of the editors' failure to target a unified audience and adapt their selections to it, it is unlikely that these articles will have the readership they deserve. Unfocused, hodge-podge collections like this are common in academic publishing, and always annoying, but they are particularly egregious, I think, when they represent a field which spends so much of its time talking precisely about the importance of coherence and audience.

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