



International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching
Volume 5, Issue 3, September 2017, p. 249-256

Received	Reviewed	Published	Doi Number
06.06.2017	30.07.2017	27.09.2017	10.18298/ijlet.1794

Implied Reading in the Unforgettable Stories of Language Learners

*Feryal CUBUKCU*¹

ABSTRACT

Iser is literary theoretician and co-founder of the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics, professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Constance and the University of California, Irvine. When Iser died in 2007 in his eighty-first year, he was one of the most widely known literary theoreticians in the world. His "implied reading" theory claims that texts can themselves also awaken false expectations, alternately bringing about surprise, joy and frustration, which can be the enlargement of experience. The indeterminacy of the text might yield different responses from different readers. To prove that each implied reading is based on the schemata of the readers, this study aims at analysing the stories told by language learners of Turkish who come from 20 countries and whose ages vary between 18-32. The participants are 65 undergraduate and graduate university students, from African, Asian and Balkan countries, who upon watching "Cinderella" were asked to write about the unforgettable folk story or fairy tale. When their stories are item analysed, the results show that the schematas of the learners shape the way they choose and recount the stories. Lernerers of Turkish fill in the gaps throughout the story, form a meaningful bond by pulling information from it, participating in a reciprocal relationship, creating and deriving meaning in an extravaganza of interpretation.

Key Words: Implied reading, Iser, language learners, culture.

1. Introduction

Criticism eventually emancipated itself from the commentary at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It aimed no longer to translate the canonical author into contemporary understanding but Arnold phrased it "to see the object as in itself it really is " (Iser, 2000, p. 38). The interpreter seems to be living between two worlds: that of the text and that of the reader and organizing an exchange between them. The active participation of the reader/interpreter is fundamental to the novel. Iser's term "implied reader" which is used for the reader "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader's actualization of the potential through the reading process (Iser, 1974,p. xii). The reader discovers the meaning of the text and discovers a new reality. For Iser, this discovery is one form of aesthetic pleasure by offering two possibilities: first, to free himself from what he is and from the restrictions of his life and second, to exercise his faculties cognitively and emotionally. In his reading process, the reader feels the new meaning by filling up the loopholes and indeterminacy of the text. To do so he must actively participate in bringing out the meaning. Each text leaves something for its readers and in this interplay the meaning of the text materializes. The reader tries to find out the discrepancies and omissions the text inheres in. The effectiveness of the text does not depend on its rhetoric (Iser,1974, p.54) but the representation decoded by the reader through his past experiences. Texts can themselves also awaken false expectations, alternately bringing about

¹ Prof.Dr., Dokuz Eylul University, cubukcu.feryal@gmail.com.

surprise, joy and frustration, which can be the enlargement of experience. The indeterminacy of the text might yield different responses from different readers. To prove that each implied reading is based on the schemata of the readers, this study aims at analysing the stories told by language learners of Turkish who come from 20 countries and whose ages vary between 18-32. The participants are 65 undergraduate and graduate university students who upon watching “Cinderella” were asked to write about the unforgettable folk story or fairy tale. The item analysis shows that the schematas of the learners shape the way they choose and recount the stories.

Wolfgang Iser (1926–2007) was a leading German literary theoretician and co-founder of the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics, professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Constance and the University of California, Irvine. When Iser died in 2007 in his eighty-first year, he was one of the most widely known literary theoreticians in the world. Together with Hans Robert Jauss he had founded the Constance School of Literary Theory. Iser, a scholar of English literature, comes from the interpretative orientations of New Criticism and narrative theory. Iser adopts his basic model as well as a number of key concepts from the work of Roman Ingarden. He is concerned primarily with the individual text and how readers relate to it. Although he does not exclude social and historical factors, they are clearly subordinated to or incorporated in more detailed textual considerations. He believes that

Reception theory was a reaction to what appeared to be a stalemate in literary studies. Of paramount concern for this theory was the impact a piece of literature has on its readers and the responses it elicits. Instead of asking what the text means, I asked what it does to its potential readers.... The message (of the text) that was no longer to be ascertained triggered interest in what has since been called text processing—what happens to the text in reading. (Iser, 2000, p. 311)

He states that there are two poles in a literary text: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. Somewhere between the poles is the literary work, which readers create by reading or realizing a text. (Iser, 1974, p. 274)

The literary work is a combination of text and the subjectivity of the reader. Accordingly Iser maps out three domains for exploration. The first involves the text in its potential to allow and manipulate the production of meaning. Like Ingarden, Iser regards the text as a skeleton of schematized aspects that must be actualized or concretized by the reader. Second, he investigates the processing of the text in reading. Of central importance here are the mental images formed when attempting to construct a consistent and cohesive aesthetic objectivity. Finally, he turns to the communicatory structure of literature to examine the conditions that give rise to and govern the text-reader interaction (Shi, 2013, p.2).

Iser defines the implied reader as:

If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader’s presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. We may call him, for want of a better term, the implied reader. He embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of

the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader. (Iser, 1978, p. 34)

The textual structure of the implied reader is composed of three basic components: the textual perspectives, their convergent place, and the vantage point of the reader. The convergent place and the vantage point of the reader are to be actualized by the real reader; otherwise, they remain potential in the textual structure. The structured acts of the implied reader made the actualization possible. In Iser's opinion, the text gets its meaning only when it is read; so the literary work becomes meaningful only with the engagement of the reader. With the concept of the implied reader, the two components the reader and the text are not looked upon as separate entities any more. They are the two sides of a coin and they are united into an organic whole. Therefore, with the reader-text interaction, literary communication appears.

The textual structure of the implied reader is homologous to the response-inviting structure of the text. The structured acts of the implied reader is a response-projection mechanism in the reader. That is to say, confronted with the appeal structure of the text, the reader has the feeling of being forced to involve himself in the interaction with the text, in order to actualize the potential meaning.

A modern philosophical trend emphasizing the perceiver's central role in determining meaning is known as Phenomenology. Of central importance for Iser's phenomenology is the concept of the wandering viewpoint. The wandering viewpoint is a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text. This presence is at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation (Iser, 1978, p. 118). The reader's travelling through the book is a continuous process of adjustments. We have in our mind some expectations, based on our memory of characters and events, but these expectations and imaginations are continually modified, and these memories are also transformed when we go through the whole text. What we get when we read is not something fixed and completely meaningful at every point, but only a series of continuously changing views.

Iser presents the text as a potential which is concretized by the reader according to their different extra-literary standards, views, values or personal experiences. A sort of oscillation is set up between the power of the text to control the way it is read and a reader's concretization of it in terms of his or her own experience—an experience which will itself be modified in the act of reading. Meaning exists in the continuous adjustments and reconstruction to expectations. These revisions are caused in the reader's mind in the reading process while they are trying to make sense of his dialectical relationship to the text.

Iser calls his reading process as "a phenomenological approach" and the text offers the schematized views through which the subject matter can come to light through Konkretisation. The two poles that are inherent in text are the artistic and esthetic, the first of which refers to the text created by the author and the second of which is the one accomplished by the reader. If everything is given to the reader, there is nothing left for him to use his imagination and the result will be boredom. A literary text "must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working the things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and dynamic." (1974, p.275)

Iser's suggestions to read a text is listed as follows: a starting point for a phenomenological analysis is to examine the way in which sequential sentences act upon one another. This is of importance in literary texts in view of the fact that they do not correspond to any objective reality outside themselves. The world presented by literary texts is constructed out of intentionale Satzkorrelate-intentional sentence correlatives. This world created by the text in the minds of the readers do not pass like a film. The sentences are "component parts" insofar as they make statements, claims or observations.

Iser tries to answer the question "how is one to conceive the connection between the correlatives?". The sentence does not consist of a statement. In their capacity as statements, observations, purveyors of information they are always indications of something that is to come, the structure of which is foreshadowed by their specific content. That is why the literary text needs the reader's imagination. The new background brings to light new aspects of what we had committed our memory, which leads readers to form interrelations between past, present and future and these connections are the products of the reader's mind. The product of this activity is the virtual dimension of the text which is neither the text itself nor the imagination of the reader: it is the merge of the text and imagination.

It is through the process of anticipation and retrospection that leads to the formation of the virtual dimension, which, in turn, transforms the text into an experience for the reader. The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time the reality which this process helps to create one that will be different from his own. Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own. The impact the reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text, and yet in supplying all the missing links, he must think in terms of experiences different from his own. (1974, pp.281-282)

One of the activities conducted to read the text is to "picture". While expectations are continually modified, images are continually expanded and the reader will strive to fit everything together in a consistent pattern. It is the guess of the beholder that tests the medley of forms and colors for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape. This shape is not given by the text; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook. Whenever consistent reading suggests itself, illusion takes over and it is fixed and definable. Without these illusions, the unfamiliar world will stay as unfamiliar. The polysemantic nature of the text yields a lot of illusions.

Iser talks about the strategies to read: a.deviation b.foreground and background c.theme and horizon structure.

a. deviation. The deviationist model is not something new. It dates back to Mukarovsky in 1940. The violation of the norm of the standard is what makes possible the poetic utilization of the text.

b. foreground and background. Information will be innovative to the degree in which it stands out from the redundancy in which it is embedded. Redundancy provides a guarantee against errors of communication, as it allows the information to be reproduced on the basis of the knowledge which the recipient already has of the structure of the language used. The background of the literary text does

not have this character of redundancy, for it is not actually formulated by the text itself, but depends for its quantity and quality on the competence of its readers. In the communication of information, however, the redundancy must be formulated so that the newness of the information can be conveyed. This redundancy will also remain stable, for its sole function is to provide an unmistakable setting for the information that is to be imparted.

c. theme and horizon: If the function of the different perspectives is to initiate the production of the aesthetic object (the meaning of the text), it follows that this object cannot be totally represented by any one of those perspectives. And while each perspective offers a particular view of the intended object, it also opens up a view on the other perspectives. The interaction between perspectives is continuous, because they are not separated distinctly from one another, and they do not run parallel either: authorial comment, dialogue between characters, developments of plot, and the positions marked out for the reader—all these are interwoven in the text and offer a constantly shifting constellation of views. These, then, are the 'inner' perspectives of the text—to be distinguished from the 'outer' perspective, which links text to outside reality. The inner perspectives form the framework within which the selected elements are combined (Iser, 1978, p.96). As perspectives are continually interweaving and interacting, it is not possible for the reader to embrace all perspectives at once, and so the view he is involved with at any one particular moment is what constitutes for him the 'theme'. This, however, always stands before the 'horizon' of the other perspective segments in which he had previously been situated. The horizon is that which includes and embraces everything that is visible from one point. The structure of theme and horizon underlies the combination of all the perspectives, and it enables the literary text to fulfill its communicatory function, namely, to ensure that the reaction of text to world will trigger a matching response in the reader. To see how the reaction varies depending upon the different cultural schemas of the readers, the study aims at analysing the responses of the readers after they read the fairy tale of Cinderella.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

55 (32 males and 23 females) participants who are the undergraduate and graduate candidates of the public university in the western part of Turkey and who have the proficiency level of B2 and have voluntarily joined the study.

2.2. Procedure

Participants were asked to write about their favourite fairy tales that crossed their minds after having read Cinderella. Their replies are item coded and grouped in terms of the values the fairy tale Cinderella led them to recollect. The tales they wrote are believed to be the meeting place between the written text and the individual mind of the readers with their own particular history of experience and own consciousness. Each illusion they have is shaped by their own backgrounds.

3. Results

The analyses show that women and men differ in terms of their priority in life as in Table I.

Table 1 *Themes and gender*

Gender	Number	Values
Females	22	Security through marriage, friendship, love, patience
Males	33	Hardwork, family, saving the family, devotion to the country, solidarity, bravery

The female student from Tacikistan wrote the story of keloğlan (the bald boy) who wishes to marry the princess and manages to marry her after passing the test given by the King. The Iranian female student has the story between Nasreddin Hodja and the thief where he is beaten by the thief (insecure home), the Syrian lady talks about the local story of Rapunzel who is kept in the tower till a young Prince Charming comes to rescue her. The Georgian female student showcases the story of the mermaid who leaves everything behind to marry a human being, indicating that a loving marriage is better than everything in life.

On the other hand, boys' stories are concerned with fighting, bravery, courage and success. The Kazakh story focuses on the integration of mind and courage to defeat the enemies. The Kongo story is about the boy left in the forest but he manages to overcome the evil. The Erithrean, Kenyan and Palestinian male students reinforce the importance of bravery and patriotism. The Pakistani story is about defending the family, showing respect for the father. When the male students are grouped into African and Asian, the students coming from the war-torn areas have told about the war stories maintaining that peace should prevail in the world but to achieve this, one needs to fight and become the victorious. They do not hesitate to support the heroes who kill and save their countries by proving courageous and dignified. With fighting and war raging in their countries, the Somali, the Iraqi and Afghanistani students have witnessed the horrifying traces of the ordeals. The war in Somali has claimed many civilian lives in the country, and displaced many Somalis from their homes. Somalia, weakened by the lengthened war and the resulting impoverishment, has lost nearly 260,000 people to famine between 2010 and 2012. Around 4.6 % of the entire population, and 10 % of all Somalian children under the age of five, have suffered death from famine during this period (<http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-world-s-most-war-torn-countries.html>). Another war torn area Sudan has witnessed many rifes. The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) witnessed the deaths of at least 2 million Sudanese due to drought, famine, and disease, and the displacement of nearly 4 million people during the same wars. The students from Sudan indicate that though the conflict officially ended in January of 2005 by way of the signing of a peace agreement and South Sudan's independence in 2011, the Republic of Sudan has yet not fully recovered from its shaken situation, and continues to engage in conflicts with South Sudan and internal rebel forces alike.

Table 2 shows the geographical demarcation of the stories and their themes.

Table 2 *Countries and Themes*

Locations	Number	Themes
Europe (The Balkans)	3	Marriage, massacre, loss
Asia	13	Family, honesty, hard work,
Africa	24	Country, bravery, patriotism, unity, poverty, food
Middle East	10	Poverty, food, tricks
Others	5	Family, marriage, honesty

As is seen in Table 2, the students coming from the war-trodden areas opt to choose the stories about poverty, lack of food, bravery and fight whereas the students from the Far-east countries prefer hard work and honesty in their stories. The middle eastern students talk about how scarce their food has been. Their traumas are most explicit in the stories where the protagonists are poverty-stricken. The Iraqi, Syrian and Afghanistani students showcase the stories where people show perseverance despite poverty and finally overcome the problems. Despite the fact that the Middle East is blessed with a rich geological inheritance of hydrocarbons and mineral resources, it is a water-scarce and arid region that has its share of demographic and socio-economic problems. It is difficult to grow food crops in the Middle East due to scarcity of water supply and limited availability of arable land. The region is highly vulnerable to fluctuations in international commodity markets because of heavy dependence on imported grains and food items. According to a report issued in 2009 by the World Bank, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, "Arab countries are the largest importers of cereal in the world. Most import at least 50% of the food calories they consume." (<http://www.ecomena.org/tag/food-shortage-in-middle-east/>) Countries like Syria or Iraq used to be breadbaskets in the recent past but their agricultural sectors have suffered a lot due to government mismanagement, price ceilings, wars and underinvestment. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Food Programme confirmed that about 10 million Syrians are currently suffering from food insecurity, including 6.8 million who require urgent food aid. The two organisations issued a statement saying that the conflict, which has been going on in Syria since 2011, has all but destroyed the country's agricultural sector. Syria's crop of wheat for the year 2015 is estimated 40 % less than what it produced before the conflict (<http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=SYR>).

4. Conclusion

To conclude, in this analysis of the reading process, there are three important aspects included in the item analysis of the students coming from Asian and African countries:

- the process of background (anticipation and retrospection)
- the unfolding of the text as a living event
- the resultant impression of life-likeness

The need to decipher the text gives the reader the chance to formulate their own deciphering capacity. The participants of the study bring something to the fore an element of which they are not conscious of. Under the influence of their schemas and traumas, the participants narrated the stories akind to

their lives. The production of meaning of the texts does not entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can be taken over by the active imagination of the reader but also it entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves the unformulated. The unconscious unraveling begins when the participants become productive, i.e., when the text allows them to bring their own schemas into play. There are, of course, limits to the reader's willingness to participate, and these will be exceeded if the text makes things too clear or, on the other hand, too obscure. Instead of asking what the text means, Iser asks what the text does to the reader and how the readers fill in the blanks. When the participants read Cinderella, they (as readers) fill in the gaps throughout the story, they form a meaningful bond by pulling information from it, participating in a reciprocal relationship, creating and deriving meaning in an extravaganza of interpretation.

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