Intertextuality: Raising the Issue of Originality

التناص : اثارة موضوع الأصالة

Dr. Zoulaikha Elbah

Faculty of Letters and Languages

University Abbes Laghrour, Khenchela, Algeria,

elbahzoulikha@gmail.com

Abstract:

Every text exists within a network of relations with preceding, surrounding, and following texts of the same or different authors. Even at the level of the same text, one cannot escape intertextual relations. This study aims to shed light on intertextuality in relation to originality issue. In other words, admitting the unescapable intertextual character of all texts, one might question whether we can still assign originality to a given text in spite of being based on other ones. To answer this question, we refer to two important notions credited to a post-modernist understanding to reality: pre-existing reality and emerging reality. Accordingly, meaning is defined as a constructed reality that signals both a pre-existing aspect (an intertext) and an emerging one (a new perspective). It is at the level of an emerging reality that one can look for potential originality at the level of both form and function.

Keywords: Intertextuality; Influence; Originality; Pre-existing Reality; Emerging Reality.

ملخص:

يوجد كل نص ضمن شبكة من العلاقات مع النصوص السابقة، المحيطة، والتالية لنفس المؤلف أو مؤلفين مختلفين. حتى أنه لا يمكن تفادي هذا النوع من العلاقات بين أجزاء النص الواحد. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إلقاء الضوء على ظاهرة التناص فيما يتعلق بموضوع الأصالة. بعبارة أخرى، مع الاقرار بالطابع المتداخل لجميع النصوص، قد يتساءل المرء عن امكانية الحديث عن أصالة نص معين كونه قائمًا على نصوص أخرى. للإجابة على هذا السؤال، نشير إلى مفهومين مهمين يُنسبان إلى نظرية ما بعد الحداثة: المعنى الموجود مسبقًا و المعنى الناشئ. وفقًا لذلك، يتم تعريف المعنى على أنه واقع مركب جزء منه يشير إلى جانب موجود مسبقًا (نص بيني) و جزء اخر يشير الى جانب ناشئ (منظور جديد). انه على مستوى المعنى الناشئ يمكن للمرء أن يبحث عن أصالة النص في ما يخص الشكل والمضمون.

كلمات مفتاحية: التناص، التأثير، الأصالة، المعنى الموجود مسبقًا، المعنى الناشئ.

Corresponding author: Zoulaikha Elbah, e-mail: elbahzoulikha@mail.com.

1. Introduction

Each one of us belongs simultaneously to different Discourses (Gee, 1999) or discourse systems (Scollon et al., 2012), some of which we share with our social community members. It happens also that we share the same or other discourses with people whom we have never met (Elbah, 2019).

> We all are simultaneously participants in multiple discourse systems; none of us is fully defined by our participation in any single one. One is simultaneously a son or a daughter, a father or a mother, a member of a particular company, a member of a particular generation, and so forth in an indefinite number of discourse systems. (Scollon, Scollon, & Jones, 2012, p. 273)

Discourses circle among us. Some of them are the result of being influenced by people we live with, writers we read to, audiovisuals we are exposed to, etc. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we influence others and get influenced by them. Also, whether deliberately or not, both producing and processing discourse reflect this influence. One of the concepts which considers the influence between texts is that of Intertextuality. It is a term coined to Julia Kristeva in 1960s and states that each text is built on other ones. No text comes out of the blue. As such, an analysis of a given text would always reveal traces to other preceding or surrounding ones. Now, taking into account the fact that intertextuality is an unescapable reality, one may question whether we can still assign originality to some texts, and if so, on which basis?

2. Overview of Intertextuality

During the sixties, a renewal of critical thought took place with the emergence of intertextuality. This term which failed to receive an agreed-upon definition is today one of the main critical tools in literary studies.

> Since Julia Kristeva first coined the term in the 1960s, intertextuality has been a dominant idea within literary and cultural studies, taken up by practically every theoretical movement. Yet intertextuality remains the subject of such a diversity of interpretations and is defined so variously, that it is anything but a transparent, commonly understood term. (Allen, 2000)

Julia Kristeva defines the term, stating that "le mot (le texte) est un croisement de mots (de textes) où on lit au moins un autre mot (texte)"[1] (1969, p. 145). Thibault (1994,

---

[1] "the word (the text) is an intersection of words (of texts) where we read at least one other word (text)", Kristeva, J. (1969). Séméiotikè: Recherche Pour une Sémanalyse. Paris: Seuil.

p.1751) explains that "all texts, spoken and written, are constructed and have the meanings which text- users assign to them in and through their relations with other texts in some social formation".

Barthes adds

> any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text. (1981, p. 39).

3. The Origin of Intertextuality

According to Allen (2000), Kristeva was influenced by Saussurean and Bakhtinian theories of language and literature. The focal point in Saussure's theory is that the word is a relational unit. Allen (2000, p. 11) explains that "The linguistic sign is, after Saussure, a non- unitary, non-stable, relational unit, the understanding of which leads us out into the vast network of relations, of similarity and difference, which constitutes the synchronic system of language". Bakhtin, for his part, stresses the social dimension of the word (text). That is, "If the relational nature of the word for Saussure stems from a vision of language seen as a generalized and abstract system, for Bakhtin it stems from the word's existence within specific social sites, specific social registers and specific moments of utterance and reception" (2000, p. 11).

4. Intertextuality vs Intratextuality (Intertextuality Autarchic)

Lucien Dällenbach (1976) outlines specific types of intertextuality. For instance, he distinguishes between general intertextuality (intertextual relations between texts of different authors) and restrictive intertextuality or intratextuality which refers to intertextual relations within texts of the same author. He also coined the term 'autotextuality' or 'autarchic intertextuality' which he defines as "l'ensemble des relations possibles d'un texte avec lui- même"[2] (1976, p. 283). He also explains that

> le secteur de l'autotextuel peut être spécifié par la multiplication de deux couples de critères. Dès lors que l'on définit l'autotexte comme une réduplication interne qui dédouble le récit tout ou partie sous sa dimension littérale (celle du texte

---

[2] "the set of possible relations of a text with itself", Dällenbach, L. (1976). Intertexte et autotexte. *Poétique*,7(27), 282-296.

entendu strictement) ou référentielle (celle de fiction)[3]. (p. 283)

5. Production and Reception

As stated above, intertextuality is not limited to production processes but concern reception ones as well. That is, when we produce or receive a given text, there is always a reference to other ones; "The meanings we produce and find within language, then, are relational; they depend upon processes of combination and association within the differential system of language itself" (Allen, 2000, p. 10). Texts exist in networks of relations which leave no chance to independent existence. When we produce a text, we refer back to knowledge about the medium of interaction (linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors) and knowledge about the subject matter. That is, traces to other texts can take place at the level of form and meaning. In short, we cannot create a text from nothing; we do produce it relying on pre-existing ones.

Also, to decipher the meaning communicated in a given text, we need to rely on pre- existing knowledge (formal and functional knowledge). Also, as the text is defined in terms of relations of similarity and opposition it has with other ones, understanding a text necessitates understanding these former.

> To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext. (Allen, 2000, p. 1)

6. Meaning: A Negotiated Reality

The central idea around which intertextuality is based is that texts, being literary or non- literary, lack independent meaning (Allen, 2000). As such, any text is always a derivation of one or more other ones. Another important idea brought by post-modern conceptualization of language and culture phenomena, which are core concepts while considering producing and processing any text, is that meaning is a negotiated reality. Meaning is relational, relative, constructed and constructive. In other words, as opposed to stucturalist and modernist paradigms that define meaning as a pre-exiting stable reality, post-modernist understanding to meaning considers this latter as a dynamic reality that

---

[3] "The area of the autotextual can be specified by the multiplication of two criteria. Since the autotexte is defined as an internal reduplication that duplicates the whole or part of the text in its literal dimension (that of the text strictly understood) or referential (that of fiction)", Dällenbach, L. (1976). Intertexte et autotexte. *Poétique*, 7(27),282-296.

takes place on the spot. Meaning is constructed as a result of dialogism within and between pre-existing and emerging realities (Doll, 1995; Elbah, 2019; Kramsch, 2013; van Dijk, 1998). As such, dialogism exists not only between individuals (self and other), it also takes place within the same individual being a member of different ideological systems, i.e., different selves.

> Dialogism does not necessarily mean a 'conversation' between subjects equally empowered within the language game; it refers, more specifically, to a clash between languages and utterances which can foreground not only social division but a radically divided space of discursive formations within an individual subject. (Allen, 2000, p. 161)

7. Intertextuality vs Ideology

Membership within different social groups affects the way we think, hence, the way we talk, what we say, and how we interpret others' words, gestures, actions, etc. In other words, we do belong to different ideological groups. This ideological belonging(s) is reflected, whether consciously or not, in the discourse we produce. It also affects how we receive others' discourses, especially opposing ones. In other words, we can never escape our ideological belonging(s). Intertextuality, defined as set of relations among texts, signals ideological belonging of the individual subject too; "l'intertextualité n'est jamais innocente. Elle est toujours le signe d'un détournement culturel ou d'une réactivation de sens"[4] (Achour & Rezzoug, 2009, p. 7).

8. Intertextuality vs Originality

Intertextuality is an important notion that foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence among different texts at different levels (Allen, 2000), "Authors do not create their texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from preexistent texts" (Allen, 2000, p. 35). However, assigning the intertextual character to all texts, one would question whether it is always possible to talk about an original text. In other words, "In the Postmodern epoch, theorists often claim, it is not possible any longer to speak of originality or the uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or a novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art" (Allen, 2000, p. 5).

However, referring back to notions of pre-existing and emerging realities, we do

---

[4] "intertextuality is never innocent. It is always a sign of a cultural turn or a reactivation of meaning", Achour, C., Rezzoug, S. (2009). *Convergences Critiques.* Alger: Office des publications universitaires.

claim that admitting the existence of intertextual relations within and among texts does not deprive them from aspects of originality. By the contrary, Fairclough claims that intertextuality "points to how texts can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourses) to generate new ones" (1992, p.270). Say it differently, to produce a given stretch of discourse be it a novel, a painting, a play, a scientific book, a theory, etc., the author relies on a pre- existing knowledge. However, putting this latter in a new context reflects two sorts of realities: a pre-existing one, which is the starting point of any product, and an emerging one which is the outcome of putting this pre-existing knowledge in a new context. That is, a given text is not entirely a repetition of already existing knowledge. Otherwise, how can we justify the plethora of changes that take place every day in different fields including: literature, medicine, scientific research, etc.

In fact, one can refer paradoxically to the origin of the term intertextertuality to claim for the existence of originality. As mentioned above, Kristeva coined the term based on the works of both Saussure's relational word and Bakhtin's social word (Allen, 2000). As such, the new term 'intertext' reflects some pre-existing reality (Saussure's and Bakhtin's works). It also reflects an emerging one demonstrated in the blending of both theories. Allen refers to the development of the term referring to

> intertextuality through its major theoretical contexts, from its origins in Kristeva's blending of Saussure and Bakhtin, through its poststructuralist articulation in the work of Barthes and its structuralist articulation in Genette and Riffaterre, on to feminist and postcolonial adaptations of the term, and finally to its application within the non-literary arts, the current cultural epoch and modern computer technologies. (Allen, 2000, p. 6).

Each step within the development of the term confirms an intertextual aspect; yet, it also reflects an original one. Originality resides in new forms, perspectives, attitudes, etc. that may foster or challenge pre-existing ones.

9. CONCLUSION

The emergence of a new critical concept like that of intertextuality has redefined every text within a network of relations with other ones. One of its main assumptions states that every text, in part or in whole, sets formal and functional relations with already existing ones. The assumption that every text is absolutely built on other ones has raised the issue of originality. However, with reference to postmodernist understanding to meaning, reality is understood as both: a pre-existing reality (defined within the inter/intratextual relations) and an emerging reality (a new reality). Originality, then, is defined within this latter, and just like the intertext, it can take place at the level of both

form and function (meaning).

6. References

[1] Achour, C., Rezzoug, S. (2009). *Convergences Critiques*. Alger: Office des publications universitaires.

[2] Allen, G. (2000). *Intertextuality*. London, UK: Routledge.

[3] Barthes, R. (1981). Theory of the Text. In R. Young (Ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 31-47.

[4] Dällenbach, L. (1976). "Intertexte et autotexte. *Poétique"*, 7(27), 282-296.

[5] Doll, B. (1995). Post-modernism's utopian vision. In P. McLaren (Ed.), *Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and Pedagogy*, Albert Park, Australia: James Nicholas Publishers, 89-101.

[6] Elbah, Z. (2019). Overcoming EFL Learners' Ethnocentric Discourse through Developing Intercultural Communication Sensitivity. Ouargla, Algeria: Kasdi Merbah University Ph.D. dissertation.

[7] Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

[8] Gee, J. P. (1999). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method.* London: Routledge.

[9] Kramsch, C. (2013). "Culture in foreign language teaching", *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1(1), 57–78.

[10] Kristeva, J. (1969). *Séméiotikè: Recherche pour une Sémanalyse.* Paris: Seuil.

[11] kristeva, J. (1986). Word, dialogue and novel. In T. Moi (Ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 34– 61.

[12] Scollon, R., Scollon, S. W., Jones, R. H. (2012). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach* (3rd ed.). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

[13] Thibault, P. J. (1994). Intertextuality. In R. E. Asher (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 4, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1751-1754.

[14] Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach.* London: Sage.

[15] Ware, P. D., & Kramsch, C. (2005). "Toward an intercultural stance: Teaching German and English through telecollaboration", *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(2), 190–205.