

Meaning Construction in Processing of Intertextual References

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As Bakhtin (1975) noted, human thinking is dialogical in its nature. A written text does not exist in isolation, but in connection with other texts. The links between the texts manifest themselves in a form of intertextual references. Decoding intertextual references allows the reader to produce the meaning that cannot be produced otherwise. Therefore, intertextuality can be viewed as an important cognitive process. In view of the fact that not much research has been done in the area, the current study attempts to combine the insights of the literary study of intertextuality with modern views of cognitive linguistics.

The present analysis of intertextual references taken from novels by D. Lodge (1975, 1989) is based on the methods of one of the central theories of cognitive linguistics, Conceptual Integration Theory. According to the theory, any experience is fixed in memory in form of a mental space – a cognitive structure, consisting of a set of elements. Conceptual integration of mental spaces is a basic mental operation that leads to new meaning. Selected elements of mental spaces match and establish connections (Fauconnier, Turner 2003). Any text that has been read also becomes fixed in memory in form of a conceptual structure. This makes the theory applicable to the analysis of intertextual references.

The results of the study show that intertextuality represents relation between at least two mental spaces: one of a new text and one of a source text or more general background knowledge. While the form of the references may be similar, e.g. quotations, they may differ in terms of meaning production. Intertextual references lead the reader to different types of background knowledge (i.e. a memory of a particular source text, of a historical event or basic ideas of some general truths). The reader's orientation towards a particular kind of knowledge is determined by the reader's competence and the match between the mental spaces provided by the texts, participating in the process of meaning production. The elements of the mental structures that match establish connections creating new meanings. The elements that do not match stay hidden and do not come into focus in the reader's memory.

Examination of intertextuality in a literary text from the point of view of cognitive linguistics reveals heterogeneous nature of intertextuality and explains the reader's orientation towards a particular kind of knowledge while processing intertextual references.