A Discourse Analysis of R. K. Narayan's
The Man-eater of Malgudi

Susan Nirmala.S, M.A., M.Phil.

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R. K. Narayan

1. A Brief Introduction to Discourse Analysis

'Text linguistics' and 'discourse analysis' extend the linguistic analysis of sentence to groups of sentences related in some cohesive manner and thus form a text. Conventional linguistic analysis focuses on the structure of sentence, whereas discourse analysis goes beyond this scope. Indian grammarians, such as Tolkappiyar in Tamil, actually had discourse analysis as the basis and goal of their linguistic description.

The word 'text' in text linguistics does not take up the image of whole text. The word 'text' is here used to designate any whole product of human linguistic capacity, for example, an utterance, and include in it words and tone groups at one end and large bodies of textual matter such as novels, etc. at the other end. And the overall designation given to any linguistic exploration of the text is text linguistics. Most often the text is composed of phrases and clauses, and the concepts it represents and activates are cohesive and coherent.

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Discourse patterns reveal themselves in many interesting ways when it comes to the use of language. It is the social meaning of language that is emphasized by sociolinguistics. In fact, something important is missed out in the study of language, if it does not describe how language is used to talk to friends, scold children, conduct business, and grumble and so on. As far as the native speaker of a language is concerned, the syntax and semantics of the language is nothing other than a set of procedures for performing things with their language, for giving instructions to others on what to do, and so on. The element of language need not have a stable, uniform or exclusive identity.

A single element may have different functions. For example, the word 'last' can be used as a verb, noun, adverb or adjective. In the similar way, a single function may also be assigned to different elements. For example 'The child plays well'. Here the function of 'well' depends on the language user. It may mean that the child is good in everything and so good in playing too, or it may mean that the child is good in playing alone. So the language user may construe 'well' as an attribute of 'play' or as an attribute of 'child'.

2. Linguistic Relations

The science of linguistics concerns itself with describing and explaining the units of linguistic form or content. Depending upon the organization of the user's knowledge of his or her own language, one can perceive two dimensions of the language.

A. Intertextual

Those relations recognized between the piece of text at hand and other segments that are partly like it and partly unlike it are intertextual. In other words, this means knowledge of phonemic contrast, i.e., Knowing precisely how and where 'lice' and 'rice' differ at the phonological level; and also knowledge of minimal semantic contrasts in lexical fields. In other words, this means knowing, for example, that 'boy' is simultaneously 'not girl' and 'not man'.

B. Intratextual

Those relations recognized between given pieces of a single text are intratextual.
It means a recognition of the relations between a given unit in a text and its co-constituents that is the other units found in the same text. Two dependencies of intratextual relations are anaphoric and cataphoric.

2.1 Anaphoric

Anaphoric here means a reference which leads from a presented unit to something which has been said (or assumed) earlier in the text. That is, recognizing what something is through an awareness of something that has been presented earlier in the text; in other

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words, seeking a connection between the presented unit and that which has already been presented earlier.

Take for instance, what Nataraj says: "I was suddenly inspired by the lesson taught by my adjournment lawyer, not to mix up accounts." (88)

From the above sentence, we can understand that Nataraj was already advised by the adjournment lawyer: "Oh, no absolutely different situations. Don't mix up accounts, whatever else you may do. It always leads to trouble". (65)

2.2 Cataphoric

Those references leading from the presented unit to entities appearing later in the text is cataphoric. That is recognizing what something is and by virtue of that sensing its connectedness to something found later in the text: "Give it here" he said, snatching away the green folder too. "I will double it for you. You mind the other things." (115)

Later Nataraj says:

> Not all my precautions to leave things alone could keep me from giving a jump when I saw the green-folder peeping from within the folds of his cloths (168)

2.3 Cohesion

Syntax is the way words are put together into sentences. But grammar has more to do with writing than just this. Syntax can, in a way, also contribute to the way sentences themselves are put together into larger arrangements. It is the extent to which such separate sentences manage to hold together that is measured on the scale of cohesion.

Two phrases or two clauses are joined together with the help of conjunctions. In the same way two sentences can be joined together with a simple conjunction to attain cohesion in the sentences. The following excerpt relies on this use of conjunction for its cohesion. (The reference made here, is to the arrangements made for the temple festival in the novel *The Man-eater of Malgudi.*)

> Four professional cooks were engaged, and several thousand little receptacles made of banana bark would be filled with sweetened rice and distributed. *And* then there were the Kitson lights and petrol lamps for the illumination of the temple and the procession, in addition to torches soaked in oil. (126)

Another example is given below:

(The reference made here, is to Nataraj's search for the animal doctor.)

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It was so restful that I could have set my bicycle against the trunk of a tree and gone to sleep on the mud under the shade of the tree. *But* duty impelled me on…….. (92)

Cohesion relates also to the content expressed. Often we speak with cohesion, but at times our content may not be wholly related within an utterance. Extreme cases of lack of cohesion may be found in the speech of schizophrenic individuals.

2.4 Redundant Exclamations

We may find some sentences which may begin with words like 'Oh', 'Ah', 'Yeah,' etc. Such exclamations used at the beginning of sentences are called as 'redundant exclamations'.

Some examples of redundant exclamations used in *The Man-eater of Malgudi* are listed below:

1) Ah, I'am so happy sir to know you (37)
2) Oh, no they won't be hurt (33)
3) Hi, who is there? (93)
4) "Oh Sir" she begged "Don't do that" (123)
5) Ah, Muthu, Muthu. Come in please (143)
6) Oh good, you will cooperate with us (69)
7) Ah, how many centuries it seems to me (71)
8) Oh, that. It was shot by mistake (82)
9) Oh, the ghost of the hyena has come back (119)
10) Oh,iron-willed men! Very good I agree with you (148)
11) Oh, you are asking as if you didn't know (84)
12) Oh, yes now it cam like a flash (87)
13) Oh, the boys are there, they can manage it (87)
14) 'Oh, master!' appealed Muthu 'should I teach a wise one like you what to speak and when, and what not to speak?' (96)
15) Aha, I cried unable to restrain myself (104)
16) Oh, that's all right, Doctor, I'm happy to see you (136)
17) Oh, I should be with him (142)
18) Ah, I forgot about this. I have brought something to eat (131)
19) Oh, I have forgotten Rangi (171)
20) Oh. When Muthu and his party arrive, I must leave a guide at the bus-stand to take them to the temple (127)

2.5 Repetitive Phrases used in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*

There are many phrases which have been used in the novel time and again. One example is the phrase 'like a halo'

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1) His head suddenly vanished, and a moment later a new head appeared in its place, a large forehead and a shock of unkempt hair, *like a black halo*…… (15)
2) His hair was covered with dust and stood up more *like a Halo* than ever (48)
3) There was a photograph………. Young man with wavy hair standing up *like a halo* ear to ear, and bushy eyebrows. (114)

Another example of repetitive phrases used in the novel is given below.

1) I have the gun with me at *point-blank* range (165)
2) The journalist stated *point-blank* (148)
3) 'No' I said *point blank* (77)
4) And you just gave it a four-nought –five charge at *point-blank* range (29)
5) 'Have you plans to excite it?" I asked *point-blank* (133)
6) Sometimes he was obliging and some times he refused *point-blank* (117)

These repetitive phrases come directly from Indian Spoken English. These add to the aura of Indianness and also bring out the manner by which emphasis of various things are brought out.

2.6 Use of Translated Proverbs in Dialogue Discourse

1) "Sastri, you know the old proverb that when your cloth is caught in the thorns of a bush, you have to extricate yourself gently and little by little, otherwise you will never take the cloth whole?" (75)
2) He quoted a proverb to the effect that building a house and conducting a marriage were the two Herculean tasks that faced a man. (48)
3) "You may close the mouth of an oven but how can you close the mouth of a town?" she said, quoting a proverb (177)
4) He set it off with another profounder one in Sanskrit, which said that to deal with a rakshasa one must possess the marksmanship of a hunter, the wit of a pundit, and the guile of a harlot (75)

These proverbs are generally from the current Tamil idiom. The beauty of R. K. Narayan's discourse is that such expressions come out naturally and are understood by those who are not part of the context and by those who read the novel away from the Indian shores.

If a proverb is one man's wit and all men's wisdom, R. K. Narayan has rendered into the novel his wit, which is peculiar to himself, through the mouth of his characters. In this process, he also accomplishes smooth and easy flow of events and dialogues.
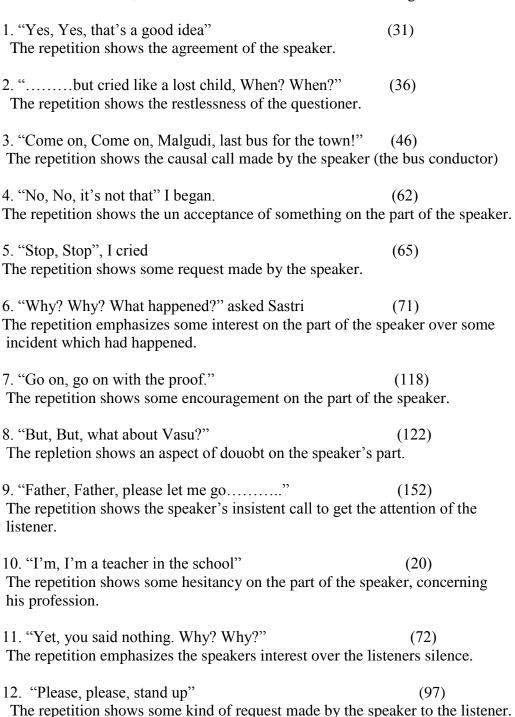
2.7 Words repeated in Sentences

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There are certain words in the novel *The man eater of Malgudi* which have been employed in the same sentence twice. They are mainly repeated to give emphasis to a point or to reveal the speaker's feelings.

Examples of such sentences, in which the same word is used twice are given below:

1. "Yes, Yes, that's a good idea"   (31)
   The repetition shows the agreement of the speaker.

2. "………but cried like a lost child, When? When?"   (36)
   The repetition shows the restlessness of the questioner.

3. "Come on, Come on, Malgudi, last bus for the town!"   (46)
   The repetition shows the causal call made by the speaker (the bus conductor)

4. "No, No, it's not that" I began.   (62)
   The repetition shows the un acceptance of something on the part of the speaker.

5. "Stop, Stop", I cried   (65)
   The repetition shows some request made by the speaker.

6. "Why? Why? What happened?" asked Sastri   (71)
   The repetition emphasizes some interest on the part of the speaker over some
    incident which had happened.

7. "Go on, go on with the proof."   (118)
   The repetition shows some encouragement on the part of the speaker.

8. "But, But, what about Vasu?"   (122)
   The repletion shows an aspect of douobt on the speaker's part.

9. "Father, Father, please let me go……….."   (152)
   The repetition shows the speaker's insistent call to get the attention of the
    listener.

10. "I'm, I'm a teacher in the school"   (20)
   The repetition shows some hesitancy on the part of the speaker, concerning
    his profession.

11. "Yet, you said nothing. Why? Why?"   (72)
   The repetition emphasizes the speakers interest over the listeners silence.

12. "Please, please, stand up"   (97)
    The repetition shows some kind of request made by the speaker to the listener.

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13. "Poet, Poet, I cried feebly"   (180)
   The repetition shows that the speaker is trying to draw the attention of the
    listener, at the moment of helplessness.

14. "How, How? What do you expect me to do?"   (109)
   The repetition shows the speakers interest to know something.

15. "Now, now, don't be ridiculous".   (141)
    The repetition shows that the speaker is trying to draw the attention of the
     listener, to what he is saying.

Reduplication as a linguistic process is quite common in all Indian languages: Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidan and Indo-Aryan languages. This feature is also very common in Indian Spoken English. R. K. Narayan masterfully makes use of this easily handled feature of Indian languages in Indian Spoken English.

3. Dialogue Discourse

There are some dialogues in the novel *The man eater of Malgudi* which are half uttered sentences, (i.e.,) sentences which are not fully complete. Though these sentences may seem incomplete grammatically, the meaning or the message they wish to impart to the reader are not totally lost. The reader can easily comprehend the meaning or the message given through such half uttered sentences.

One example of such a dialogue is given below: (Reference: Vasu has plans of shooting the temple elephant, Kumar from his window during the temple procession in the evening. When Sen and Muthu come to know of Vasu's drastic plans, they warn him with their words.)

> Sen said, "If anything happens to the people or the procession…………."
> Muthu said, "We know what you are trying to do with that elephant. If anything happens………." which only provoked Vasu's mirth. The Inspector got to his feet, glared at Vasu and said, "I'll get you for this……………." (151).

4. Conclusion

   It can be said that in his use of English Narayan is simple, readable and enjoyable. Narayan will ever be remembered for his simplicity of language and spontaneity of expression. As rightly said by him, his novels have succeeded in "Conveying unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities who flourish in a small town named Malgudi located in a corner of South India." (22)

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