

THE PRAGMATICS OF LITERARY COMMUNICATION

Teun A. van DIJK
University of Amsterdam

I. PRAGMATICS

The aim of this paper is to give a brief survey of the possible applications of pragmatics in the study of literature. The use of the term "possible" implies that the pragmatic analysis of literary communication is still in its programmatic phase: little substantial research has been carried out in this area, and most suggestions are in fact extensions from the more linguistic study of pragmatics. In this first section, then, we must summarize the main insights of philosophical and linguistic pragmatics before we can see whether they may be used in the formulation of relevant problems of poetics.

As may be well known by now, pragmatics is the third component in a triad, of which syntax and semantics are the other two, much better known components. Together these constitute a linguistic, or stated more generally semiotic, theory of language. Since formal languages abstract from the pragmatic context, and because "utterances" of a logical language only function as assertions, we may say that pragmatics essentially deals with natural language. In order to clearly mark the different tasks of syntax, semantics and pragmatics we may use the highly simplified slogan according to which syntax is the study of what and how (it) is said or expressed, semantics the study of what is (thereby) meant, and pragmatics the study of what (thereby) is *done*. In other words, pragmatics is that part of language which focuses on *action*. The key term, developed mainly by philosophers such as Austin and Searle in the sixties, is that of a *speech act*. A speech act is the act accomplished when the speaker produces an utterance of a natural language in a specific kind of communicative situation. Such a situation is called a *context*. This means that a speech act is not just an act of "talking" or "meaning" but, in addition, and crucially, a *pragmatic* act, by which members of a speech community interact with each other.

Whereas a syntax specifies the rules according to which an expression, e.g. a sentence, is "well-formed", and a semantics the rules according to which such an expression is "meaningful", i.e. interpretable relative to some situation or possible world, pragmatics is concerned with the formulation of the rules according to which a speech act is *appropriate* relative to a context. Part of the *appropriateness conditions* involved are identical with those holding for successful action in general, and do not therefore belong to more specific tasks of pragmatics. These general

notions from the philosophical theory of action will not be dealt with here. It will be sufficient to recall that actions are so-called *intensional* objects, i.e. objects based on the assignment of an interpretation to an observable "expression". What we actually *see*, viz. bodily movements of some kind, are not, as such, actions but *doings*, which we interpret by convention as actions. We *see* somebody raising his hand, but depending on the situation *understand* this is a greeting, a warning, a stop signal, etc. Essential for action, next, is the fact that they are *intended*, viz. by the person accomplishing the doing. This intention involves still rather obscure notions such as "awareness," "consciousness," "control," "purpose." etc. All this also holds for the actions accomplished by the utterance (doing) of a sentence or discourse of some natural language, i.e. of some conventional structure of sounds/words with a specific syntactic structure and semantic interpretation. The pragmatics of natural language, thus, specifies which further specific properties of the context must be satisfied in order for the utterance to *count as* an appropriate speech act.

The appropriateness conditions for speech acts are usually given in terms of properties of the speech participants, viz. of speaker and hearer. These properties are *cognitive* and *social* in nature: on the one hand they are specified in terms such as 'knowledge,' 'belief,' 'want,' 'preference,' etc., and on the other hand in terms such as 'authority,' 'power,' 'politeness,' 'role,' 'status,' 'obligation,' etc.

Thus, we may accomplish the speech act of ADVICE by uttering a sentence like "You better take this medicine," but we do so only in an *appropriate* way if and only if a series of conditions are satisfied, such *as*: "the action denoted has positive consequences for the hearer," "the speaker must believe that (such a positive consequence will obtain)," "the speaker believes that the hearer will not accomplish the action on his own initiative," "the speaker is in a position (e.g. role: doctor, etc.) of authority with respect to which the judgement about what is 'good' in a certain domain can be made," etc.

Pragmatics is especially *linguistic* if it moreover specifies how (appropriate) speech acts in some contexts are related to specific grammatical structures of the utterance. Not only are we able to *express* what we (now) *do*, e.g. when we use so-called performative sentences such as "I could advise you to take this medicine," but also other properties of sentences, such as tenses, pronouns, particles, word-order, and of course the meaning of the utterance may be involved. Thus, in our example the sentence contains the word *better*, which expresses the underlying pragmatic condition of "preference". Similarly, advice pertains to future action of the hearer, a condition which is indeed also part of the meaning of the sentence. Hence, an integrated linguistic theory systematically relates morpho-phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic structures, i.e. sounds, forms, meaning, and actions.

Much in the same way as sentences are often combined into sequences and thus may constitute a *discourse* or *text*, speech acts may come in sequences, both in monologues and in conversation. Just like sequences of sentences (texts), such sequences of speech acts must satisfy combinatorial conditions: the speech acts must be *connected* with each other, and must satisfy other conditions of *coherence*. in order to count as a rational and appropriate (complex) act of communication. The most obvious example is that of the question-answer pair: if we ask somebody

a question, our hearer will, at least in certain contexts, have the conventional obligation to answer. More specifically, if we make a request, we will often add an assertion expressing our reason or motivation for the request. In general, then, connections often pertain to *conditional* relations between speech acts: one speech act may serve as a (possible, probable, or necessary) condition, component, or consequence of another speech act.

Similarly, just as a text may also be assigned a more *global meaning*, made explicit in terms of semantic *macro-structures* which account for the intuitive notion of the "topic" of a text, a sequence of speech acts may also constitute, as a whole, a *global speech act*, which is made explicit in terms of *pragmatic macro-structures*. Thus, we may give a piece of advice to somebody, but not only by one sentence, but also by a much longer text, e.g. some document in which the reasons and implications of the advice are stated, viz. as assertions or other speech acts. In that case, the whole sentence has the global social function of a piece of advice. The grammatical "basis" of such global speech acts are the semantic macro-structures mentioned, which cannot be discussed here.

II. LITERARY COMMUNICATION

Before we try to mention some issues in the pragmatics of literature, we should make some more general preliminary remarks about the notion of "literary communication" and its role in literary scholarship (poetics). It is well-known that the bulk of literary studies, both traditional and modern, focus on the analysis of the literary *text* and not on the *processes* of literary *communication*. To be sure, there have also been an impressive number of studies relating to the psychological, social and especially historical "contexts" of literature, but these components of an integrated theory of literature have been both marginal and methodologically "weak" in the sense of being far from systematic theoretical and empirical research. Nevertheless, we here adopt the by now widely accepted point of view according to which a sound theory of literature comprises both a theory of the literary text and a theory of literary contexts (including a theory relating the latter to the former). Those views which hold that literary theory should be concerned with the "literary text" alone are unwarranted and ideological: not only the *structures* of the literary text are important, but also its *functions*, as well as the conditions of production, processing, reception, etc., as they are accounted for in psychological, sociological, anthropological, and historical studies. A pragmatic account of literature has its natural place in such a theory. It assumes that in literary communication we not only have a text, but that the production (and interpretation) of such a text are social actions.

That a theory of literature should be a theory of all relevant properties of literary communication may already be concluded from the well-known fact that *as such* no structures of the literary text are necessarily and exclusively "literary." Whether a text with certain properties *functions as* a literary text depends on social and historical *conventions* which may vary in time and culture. Thus, narrative structures may characterize both a literary novel and an everyday story, metric

structures used to occur both in literary and non-literary texts, specific (e.g. "rhetorical") operations are typical both in poetry and advertisements, etc. Hence, not only the structures of a text "as" literary, but also specific structures of the respective contexts of communication.

Thus, in an account of the psychological contexts of literature, we must make explicit which more specific processes of production and interpretation characterize literary communication. Taking the side of comprehension, we should specify how structures of literary texts can be and conventionally are perceived, presented in memory and related to systems of knowledge, beliefs, norms, evaluation, etc. —and how these processes differ from the comprehension of other kinds of discourse. It is known that some kinds of literary narrative take longer to understand than nonliterary narrative, and that certain types of poetry require more, and more complicated, processing than most literary narrative. This kind of cognitive analysis of literary communication has not yet begun. Without it, though, no serious insight can be gained into the emotive effects of literary interpretation, involving our needs, wishes, desires, likings, and other "feelings." The *aesthetics* of literary communication is a complex function of these cognitive and emotive structures.

Yet these psychological properties of literary communication are not independent. Our systems of knowledge, beliefs, wishes, norms, etc., are *socially* bound: they depend on the rules, conventions, norms, values, and other properties of a culture or community. We *learn* the specific conventions of literary communication in social contexts of education and institutions. Together with ideologies concerning "typical" properties and values of literature and art —and their "creators"— we obtain, in a certain social class, implicit and explicit information about how to behave in assumed literary contexts: e.g. to produce social talk with respect to judgements about accepted literary texts. How this talk is organized, when and where it takes place, and how it is determined by education, social stratification, institutions, and the roles, norms, and values defining these, are all genuine problems of a sociological investigation of literary education. Again, although somewhat more than about the psychological processing of literature, little explicit insight has been gained in this kind of analysis.

This section is only a reminder, stating some of the more general principles and some well-known problems. It gives only a vague sketch of the framework of which literary pragmatics is an integral part.

III. THE PRAGMATICS OF LITERATURE

Since this brief paper cannot possibly undertake a vast investigation into all pragmatic aspects of all kinds of literary communication, we will have to limit ourselves to some programmatic proposals and to some examples.

The pragmatics of literary communication will have to deal with the following kinds of issues and problems:

- (i) What kind(s) of action are accomplished by the production of literary texts?
- (fi) What are the appropriateness conditions of these actions?

- (iii) What is the structure of the context in terms of which the appropriateness is defined?
- (iv) How are "literary actions" and their context related to structures of literary text?
- (v) In which respect are these actions, contexts and textual manifestations similar to and/or different from those in other types of communication, both verbal and non-verbal?
- (vi) Which extant problems of both poetics and the actual functioning of literature in society can be (re-)formulated in terms of a pragmatic theory?

More generally, these queries will also require an investigation into other, foundational and interdisciplinary problems of literary pragmatics:

- (vii) mentioned above (action, appropriateness, etc.)?
- (viii) What is the social and cultural basis of the pragmatic notions mentioned above: which conventions, norms, values, and which societal structures link the appropriateness of "literary" action with the actual processes of acceptance, rejection, etc., of literary texts?

Let us try to spell out some of these queries. The first problem, viz. what kind of speech act the production of literary text is, is full of intricacies. The most simple and straightforward answer would be that "literature" constitutes a speech act on its own. Since a literary text usually consists of several sentences and because each of these sentences may as such be taken as a possible speech act, this answer would imply that literature could be a speech act only at the *global* level, i.e. function as a *macro-speech act*.

In order to be able to decide whether this (simple) answer is correct, we should compare the "literary" speech act with other kinds of speech acts and see whether they have basic pragmatic properties in common; and secondly, we should formulate the appropriateness conditions of such a "literary" speech act.

The typical basic function of a speech act is to change "the mind" of a hearer as a function of the interpretation of an utterance. More particularly, this change pertains to the knowledge, beliefs and wishes of hearers, and the speech act ultimately has the purpose that this change in knowledge, etc., will have specific mental and social actions as a consequence. Thus, a request to do a will bring it about that the hearer knows that the speaker wants a and that a be accomplished by the hearer, and on the basis of this knowledge the hearer may eventually decide and intend, and actually execute a. For other directives, such as orders, advice, etc., the process will be similar. In other speech act contexts the hearer will know that the speaker has some commitment with respect to him (promise), or he will know that the speaker has a specific attitude with respect to his (the hearer's) past, actual or future actions (accusation, congratulation, etc.). In general, then, there is a change in the social relationships existing between speaker and hearer. This also holds in those kinds of communication which are "uni-lateral," written and indirect, such as laws, declarations, contracts, advertisements, public lectures, etc.:

the hearer/reader obtains some knowledge and may be placed under obligations, obtains some right, and so on, e.g. with respect to the state, an institution or other "source" of the message. Yet we here are already at the limit of speech act theory on the one hand and a theory (typology) of discourse on the other hand: a law is not —as such— a speech act but it can hardly be denied that issuing a law is a kind of directive, because it changes the social relations of its "hearers" (addressees), e.g. with respect to the speaker (addresser).

Now, in which respect would a "literary" speech act meet similar requirements? First of all, it can hardly be said that reading a literary text brings about a specific social relationship between writer and reader, at least not in the sense explained above. A literary text in general does not put a reader under obligation, does not necessarily direct the reader to a form of (social) action as advice, orders or requests do. But, in fact, there are also kinds of non-literary communication which lack these kinds of contextual properties. The most "elementary" speech act, that of *assertion*, only requires that the hearer change his knowledge set. Then, everyday stories may have the nature of such an assertion, at least at the macrolevel. Yet, the condition holding in this case, viz. that the speaker assumes that the respective propositions of the story are true, needs to hold for literary communication. The same would hold, however, for invented everyday stories, such as jokes. Semantically speaking, these are true only in (more or less) possible worlds which are alternatives to the real world. They are not lies, however, because the speaker does not want the hearer to believe that the story is true. So, stories of this kind may function as *quasi-assertions*, which are assertions which are not true in the actual world, and which therefore need not to be taken *seriously* as information relevant for the real-world interaction of the communicative context. Their social function, thus, is primarily based on the fact that the hearer may be, or is expected to be, "amused." This means that the hearer changes his *attitude* with respect not to some specific event or object outside the communicative situation, but with respect to the text and the context itself. We here find the well-known principle formulated by Jakobson that in literary communication the focus of attention is on the "message" for its own sake. Although this pragmatic principle may at least basically hold for literature, we see that it also holds for non-literary communication like making jokes, wisecracks or telling funny stories.

The same may be argued for utterances functioning as exclamations, complaints, and other kinds of "expressives": they merely are intended with the purpose to provide the hearer with some knowledge about the (emotive) state of the speaker, possibly with the further purpose to arouse pity. Well, since Aristotle this has also been claimed as a pragmatic principle of literature. With the possible difference that in a complaint we have pity for the speaker and in a drama rather for the characters, and in a poem for the (represented) 1. Again, if literary texts may have "expressive," speech act nature, they should at least in part count as "quasi-expressives," because even when the first person pronoun is used, literary convention tells us that the expressive need not be about the author himself. But again, quasi-expressives not only occur in literary communication: we may use them every day in order to attract attention. And conversely, not every literary text would qualify as an expressive, so we still do not have a discriminating

pragmatic feature for the definition of an assumed "literary" speech act.

So, at first sight it seems difficult to maintain something like a specific "literary" speech act. Yet, the observations made above leave open the possibility to assign a specific speech act status to at least a certain class of utterances, which besides literary texts would contain jokes, everyday stories, wise-cracks, etc. In all these cases at least one major communicative function is to operate a change in the set of attitudes of the hearer with respect to the speaker and/or the text itself (or certain properties of this text). This attitude may perhaps itself vary in kind, but intuitively speaking at least the notion of "liking," involving evaluation, and hence values and norms, seems to be the central attitude effected. The theoretical problem in this case is however that the possible *consequences* of speech acts are not usually taken as appropriateness conditions of speech acts. In this sense, for instance, there is no speech act of "persuasion": we are able to promise, to make a request or to congratulate, but we cannot at will persuade somebody, thereby using speech acts such as assertions, questions, etc. Persuasion is successful only if the hearer has changed his mind in accordance with the purposes of the speaker. Something very similar seems to be at work in literary communication and the sorts of discourse belonging to the same functional class: we may *try* to amuse somebody, or to affect his emotions in other ways, but these are only possible consequences of the communicative act. Yet, there is also a difference with the example of persuasion (usually called not an illocutionary act, but a prelocutionary act, i.e. an act which *by* certain speech acts aims at certain consequences). A joke, for instance, remains a joke, even if my hearer does not find it funny at all. In fact, the same might be said for most kinds of literature. I may intend to write a poem or a short story, and will *thereby* accomplish a specific communicative act if I satisfy some more general conditions. Whether my product will be effectively considered and treated as "literary" in the sense of belonging to "good" literature, as it is defined by reviews, text books, and the whole *institution* of Literature, is not important for our question what kind of speech act is involved: the promise of a president at an international meeting also has different consequences, namely institutional, from my promise to a friend. So, we may conclude that there are reasons to introduce a kind of illocutionary act which involves the intention to change the attitude of the hearer with respect to the context (text, speaker, etc), especially the evaluative attitudes of the hearer. We might call this kind of act an "impressive" or "ritual" speech act.

This provisional conclusion still leaves open the problem whether there is a *specific* speech act of literature. Probably this question should be answered in the negative: we should realize what the original forms and functions of "literature" were in order to understand its specific pragmatic function. It is well known that the specific notion of "literature," as such, is not very old. Indeed, our novels have their roots in everyday stories, myths, and folktales, and our poems in songs, hymns, etc. Functionally, then, our literature still belongs in the class where we also have our jokes, wise-cracks, dirty stories, etc. The differences with these kinds of communication, then, are not so much pragmatic as rather social: literature has been, we already suggested, *institutionalized*; it is published, authors assume a specific status, it is reviewed in specific papers and journals, it is taken up in text

books, discussed, analyzed, etc. A similar difference exists between the painting of my six-year-old daughter and a painting by a well-known artist; the latter assumes an institutional role (concretely so in museums and exhibitions of other kinds). Since the institution also is defined by norms and values, it will be the case that there are also conditions pertaining to the structure of the utterance itself (as in any speech act).

The attempt made above to sketch the problem about the pragmatic status of literature in terms of intended attitude change at the level of cognitive and/or emotive "liking" should not be seen as a reformulation of the classic principle which takes literature's function to be exclusively "esthetic." First of all, as we have already suggested, esthetic functions are based on communicative effects, and based on institutionalized norm and value systems—which are socially, culturally, and historically variable. This allows for the well-known fact that some kinds of discourse, although clearly having "non-ritual" pragmatic function, e.g. certain philosophical texts, may in different reception contexts be assigned certain "esthetic" functions. Secondly, it is also well-known that literature may also have more "practical" pragmatic functions, e.g. be taken as an assertion, warning, congratulation, etc., depending on both the meaning of the text and the structure of the context (intentions, interpretations of readers, etc.).

This phenomenon may be explained in terms of the notion of an *indirect speech act*. An indirect speech act is a speech act which is accomplished by establishing one of its conditions. I may make a request, typically, by asserting my reason or motivation. "I'm hungry" may function as a request for food, or "That is a stupid book" as advice not to buy or read the book. Similarly, literature may well have even predominant practical functions, such as a warning, criticism, defense or piece of advice with respect to a certain attitude or action of the author or the reader(s), by asserting the conditions for such an illocutionary function. Thus, a novel may describe the atrocities of the Vietnam war, and thereby in an indirect way function as a severe criticism of American imperialism, which may even be the major function. In other cases a literary text may be pragmatically "vague" or ambiguous, in that both a literary or ritual function and a "practical" function may be assigned. In a "direct" interpretation the novel about the Vietnam war is, however, pragmatically "ritual" because certain truth conditions need not to be satisfied: the specific discourse referents introduced may be fictitious, although the events themselves may be historical, or at least very much like historical events (as Aristotle already introduced the criterion of "verisimilitude" for drama). At this semantic level, and possibly at the level of narrative structure, we find the difference indicating the distinctive pragmatic function with respect to an historical report. Since semantically, narratively and pragmatically these differences may be very small, the empirical boundaries between literature and non-literature tend to be fuzzy; the difference, as was suggested above, then merely lies in the subsequent institutional processes in which the text is playing a role, determining whether it will be accepted into the literary canon of a certain period and of a certain cultural class.

It should briefly be recalled that the pragmatic function of literary texts as it was discussed above has been merely defined at the *macro-level*. That is, the text

only has a "literary" function when taken as a whole. It may well be the case that at the *micro-level* of the respective sentences other speech acts are performed, e.g. assertions, questions, requests, etc. If we take an arbitrary sentence from a novel or a poem, this sentence may in fact be true, function as a (serious) assertion, and as such nothing in the sentence itself needs to indicate its "literary" function. Hence the pragmatic status of discourse should in the last analysis (also) be determined at the global level. The same holds for a long request, piece of advice or a law: they may contain sentences with an illocutionary force which is different from the global illocutionary force. For literary communication this is true irrespective of the fact that the speech acts involved may be quasi-assertions, or quasi-requests, e.g. because truth conditions are not satisfied, or the reader is not really requested to do something.

The next problem in the pragmatics of literature is essentially connected with the first: if literature (and a number of other types of discourse) have a specific "ritual" pragmatic function, what then are the *appropriateness conditions* of such (global) speech acts?

A first well-known condition pertains to the "semantic attitude" of speaker and hearer:

(i) The speaker does not necessarily want the reader to believe that p is true, where p denotes the complex propositional structure of the text. Note that this condition allows for the fact that p is either true or false, and that the speaker may well think p to be true. Thus, if the story happens to be true, it *could* have been false; and conversely, if it is fictitious it *could* have been true — at least if the basic postulates of our actual world are being satisfied (which assigns a different status to fantastic and science fiction literature).

Yet, the situation is a little bit more complex. Although in fact the (micro- and/or macro-) propositions expressed by a literary text may be true or false, we might adopt the classical principle that an author wants to provide "another" kind of truth, e.g. insights into typical properties of objects, coherence between events, typical attitudes or actions in given situations, etc. In other words, there may be *general* facts which are true, although their *actual* instances are false (in the real world). This is the theoretical basis which assigns the specific function of verisimilitude, both in literary and in non-literary communication (e.g. in counterfactuals or in as-if-statements, examples, etc.). It follows that condition (i) may have the following corollary:

(i') The speaker wants the hearer to believe that p implies q and that q is true. In fact, this condition seems even required in those cases where the literary text has an indirect practical function as described above. The essential appropriateness condition for the class of discourse literature belongs to has already been mentioned :

(ii) The speaker wants the hearer to like u_i where u_i is the utterance involved, i.e. the literary text. The notion of "liking" is intentionally kept vague, but we still want to have it as a pragmatic primitive. We might of course specify its psychological basis, or specify its philosophical implications, but that is not the task of pragmatics —neither do we specify what we mean by "knowledge," "belief," "want," and "do." These are problems of the *foundations* of pragmatics. In

principle "liking" in condition is intended as a specific change in the attitude system of the hearer/reader. This may be cognitive "finding good" or emotive "feeling well," and independent of the fact whether the hearer/reader is aware of the criteria, norms and values which determine this attitude.

Note also that by using the notion of an utterance we imply that the liking may be based on one, more, or all levels of the text; phonological, syntactic, semantic, stylistic, narrative, metrical, etc. The reader may like the story as such, or the way an (otherwise trivial) story is narrated, or merely the dialogues, etc. It also leaves open a possible liking of a *performance* of *u*. (taken as a type), e.g. the way a poem is read, or a drama is performed.

The pragmatic relevance of the notion of "liking" is not specific to literature, jokes, etc. If we make somebody a compliment, we want him/her to know that *we like* him, or one of his/her properties or actions. It should again be recalled that the condition as it is formulated should not be confused with the actual esthetic or other effects of the communicative act. In certain forms of avant-garde literature it may well be that hardly anybody appreciates the text, e.g. because the norms and values on which positive appreciation is based are still incompatible with it. The pragmatic condition is neutral with respect to these social and cultural systems underlying factual "acceptance." In the same way, we may give somebody a warning, e.g. by denoting an event or action which is dangerous or simply negative for the hearer. But whether a warning or a threat is actually accepted depends on what the hearer considers to be dangerous, etc., and it is not the task or pragmatics to specify *which* events are in fact dangerous in which situations and for whom. We might however distinguish between *appropriateness-for-the-speaker*, and *appropriateness-for-the-hearer*, and then formulate the conditions for illocutionary success in terms of either one, or both kinds of appropriateness: it cannot be denied that I have *warned* him, even if the intended effect does not come about because he is not afraid, and hence does not *take* my utterance as a warning (although he may well understand that I *intend it* as such). The pragmatic intricacies involved here will not be further investigated, but we will assume that the social role of language requires that the illocutionary force of utterance in the last analysis is based on what counts as such for the hearer. Just as condition (i) had a corollary we might also add a variant to (fi) of the following kind:

(ii') the speaker believes and wants the hearer to believe that (reading) *ui* is good for the hearer.

The same holds for the notion of "good" or "beneficiary" as what has been said about "liking" above. It will not be made explicit, but is a primitive pragmatic theory, occurring also in the conditions of many other speech acts, such as advice, promises, congratulations or (negatively) in warnings and threats. This condition in fact is the essential correlate of at least at the semantic level: understanding *p* and thereby *q* may be valuable information for the hearer. This pragmatic reformulation of the classical *utile et dulce* doctrine, however, is not necessarily limited to the semantics. We therefore have mentioned *u_i* — i.e. the literary utterance as a whole — because knowledge and insight may also be gained at the purely structural levels. And similarly, being "good" for the reader may also pertain to emotive properties (cf. again Aristotle's criterion of fear —or pity— arousing

qualities of drama as a condition for psychological "relief" —which might easily be reformulated in terms of modern psychology and psychotherapy).

It may be the case that still other pragmatic conditions should be formulated, especially for various kinds of literary communication. We did not want to be exhaustive but merely to discuss some major issues and problems concerning the pragmatic status of literature.

Above we have stressed the distinction between the specific *pragmatic* properties of literary communication on the one hand, and the *institutional, i.e. social*, properties of literature. It is at the latter level that literature may be distinguished from everyday stories, jokes, or other ritual speech acts. That is, in our culture literature is typically produced by those speakers who have a specific, institutionalized role, namely as "authors." Similarly, literature is typically "public" and "published," having a group as "hearer," being discussed, commented upon, and possibly canonized.

The same institutional properties define the specific status of official declarations, contracts, laws, sermons, lectures, etc. It is obvious that these institutional aspects of texts and communication are closely related to the pragmatic ones. Thus, we may have the speech acts of "conviction," or "baptizing," for which conditions should be formulated saying that the acts are successful only if performed by speakers having a specific status or role. Although the institution of literature is cultural rather than juridical or political, there is some sense in saying that "literary" texts are only appropriate when written by a "literary author." Of course, this may seem circular, and problematic for "first" literary products, but it points to the cultural fact that there is an instance which "recognizes" the text and its author as "literary." As is also the case for a conviction by a judge, other *contextual* (and textual) conditions must in that case be satisfied: not everything an author says is thereby "literary," only those texts written in his "function" of a writer; the text should be made public, published in an appropriate message —book, journal— but usually not on the front page of a news paper), etc. All these conditions play of course a crucial role in the definition of literature in the usual sense of the term, but we do not count them among the pragmatic appropriateness conditions in a more limited sense, because they are culturally different. Of course, there are few, except theoretical, grounds to reject a broader conception of pragmatics, in which the full social, institutional and even cognitive/emotive, properties of communication are made explicit.

Another aspect of the literary context is the knowledge, in both speaker and hearer, of overlapping, and ideally identical, *rule systems, conventions* or "codes" besides those of natural language. A proclamation, law, contract or specific paper must meet a number of structural and semantic conditions which are conventional or even institutionalized. For the interpretation process this means that a hearer/reader "recognizes" certain properties of the text as belonging to a specific literary convention, which allows him to assign the specific pragmatic function to the text (he would not, for instance, use a book of poems about flowers as a horticultural instruction manual). The precise nature of these systems is not at issue here, only the fact that interpretation is only *partial*, and hence the communicative act not successful, if not based on these systems. If the text is not

produced according to minimal criteria of interpretation defined by these systems, this may mean that other systems have been operative, which then should be learned, as in the case for avant-garde literature. Or it may mean that a text is not, at least temporarily or by a certain group, assigned literary status at all, especially if also other contextual properties are not satisfied.

It should be stressed that the systems involved are systems of *rules*, not yet systems of *norms* and *values*, even if these are closely related. This means that *any* kind of novel, story or poem satisfying the basic conventions would meet the pragmatic conditions, whatever its esthetic value or institutional consequences. So again, we have no means at this level to distinguish between trivial and "valuable" literature, although we might perhaps try to have our correlated conditions (1) and (2) play a role in a possible distinction. Literary texts in the strict sense, then, are such only due to other, institutional aspects of the socio-cultural context, e.g. originality with respect to the system—which is a culturally and historically dependent value.

A classic problem at the border of semantics and pragmatics will be left undiscussed here, viz. that of *perspective*. In each communicative situation the speaker will have a certain "position" and certain *attitudes* with respect to denoted events, persons or the hearer in particular. That is, he will not only provide explicit evaluative statements, but also implicitly select, describes and combines objects and events from his *point of view*. The same holds in literary communication, but the system of perspectives may be more complicated because besides his own point of view, the author may *represent* the point of view of a narrator and/or those represented persons—possibly *through* the point of view of the narrator (or in general some /). As soon as representation is involved, we no longer are at the pragmatic, but at the semantic level, although the specific aspect is that communication contexts are represented. The pragmatics of literature, then, *only* pertains to the perspective of the author himself, and to his relations with the reader(s).

Above we have discussed some pragmatic properties of literary contexts. We have assumed, however, that pragmatics should also specify how pragmatic function and context is systematically related to the *text*. In fact, we have already introduced these relationships when we mentioned specific literary rules and conventions, being used and interpreted parallel to those of the natural language system. In which respect are these pragmatically relevant? A first textual manifestation of "underlying" pragmatic structures are all kinds of announcements and (sub-) titles. Much in the same way as performative verbs may denote the illocutionary force of an utterance, a literary text—just like other kinds of discourse—may have expressions such as "novel," "poems," etc. as undertitle. Cognitively these function as preparation for the adequate pragmatic interpretation of the text.

A typical manifestation of semantico-pragmatic features of a context are *deictic expressions*. At this point literary communication has a number of particularities. The use of *I* and *you* does not necessarily mean reference to the speaker and hearer, respectively, but may denote (self-) reference of represented agents. Similarly, definite expressions, e.g. in poems, need not respect the general

rule that the individual is known to the hearer (through text or context). The specific functions of this particular use of deictic expressions will not be analyzed here.

Other pragmatic "indicators" are those of surface structure: graphical structure, and morpho-syntactic structures, even if there are other discourse types (e.g. advertisements) and similar specific rules (e.g. those of possible semi-grammaticalness, especially in poetry.)

At the semantic level we first of all have the condition already discussed for the pragmatic level: the text need not be true. More specifically, it need not denote properties or actions of speaker and hearer, as is often the case in other speech acts. We here obviously have the main source for the pragmatic nature of ritual illocutionary acts: as soon as the underlying proposition is (known to be) false the corresponding speech act will also assume a "spurious" character, at least at the micro-level: we have quasi-assertions and quasi-complaints.

Whereas other speech acts often require a specific semantic content, e.g. an action of speaker or hearer, no such requirement seems to hold for literary communication. A literary text, at least in our period and culture, may be about anything. Of course, literary narrative must satisfy the basic principles of narratives, such as description of (human or anthropomorphic) action, and a schematic structure with at least a complication and a resolution. Both the semantic and the narrative structures may however show specific operations of deletion, permutation, repetition and substitution which are conventionalized for literary communication, and which need not be spelled out here.

Although, as we said, the semantics of literary texts is in principle not restricted, especially in modern literature, such restrictions may well occur in specific types of literature or in different historical or cultural contexts. Whereas in other descriptions of psychical or social events, the account may have a more or less general character, or general conclusions added (as in a psychological or social report, a theoretical study, etc.), a novel may describe particular details which would not occur in other kinds of discourse, e.g. because they are irrelevant or inaccessible. On the other hand, much classical literature requires a specific "lexicon" in which the possible "themes" or "topoi" (sic) of a text are given. Only recently, then, a poem could also be about a table or an egg, and only in the modern novel specific trivia of everyday life could be described in detail, whereas in classic literature "important" themes, such as life, death, nature, love and hate, power, war or pride, etc. would be preferred.

This is not the place to enumerate the basic properties of literary texts. It should only be stressed that the specific ritual illocutionary force of literature may be indicated by typical textual conventions at the graphical/phonological, syntactic, stylistic, semantic and narrative levels. Maybe none of these typical structures are exclusively literary, taken in isolation, but together and given certain properties of the context already mentioned above (presentation, reading situation, etc.) they may be sufficient indications for the appropriate pragmatic interpretation of the text. Clearly, there is an interaction between text and pragmatic context: as soon as the structural properties of the text are *marked* (with respect to some rule, norm, expectation) the reader will also *remark* them, whereby the specific pragmatic

nature of ritual discourse can be brought about; and conversely: if the specific attention is not on some intention of the speaker with respect to specific beliefs, or actions of the reader, the reader is able to pay focused attention to the specific structures themselves.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Hardly anything new has been said in this paper. On the contrary, we have discussed a number of well-known principles of literary communication. We have done this, however, in terms of a pragmatic theory. This does not mean that we necessarily obtain *new* substantial insights, but that we become more aware of the theoretical nature of the problems involved, and their status within an integrated theory of literature and discourse. We were also able to make a number of distinctions between different "functions" of literature by analyzing the assumed illocutionary force of literary discourse, e.g. in relation to other types of discourse. It was concluded that there is not a specific "literary" speech act, but that pragmatically speaking literature belongs to a class of "ritual" speech acts to which also everyday discourses such as jokes and stories belong. The more specific "literary" properties, then, are being located in the institutional social context. The appropriateness conditions of ritual speech acts like literature are given in terms of intended attitude change in the hearer with respect to the utterance itself ("liking"), whereas effective "acceptance" of literature again should be sought for outside the pragmatic context, viz, in socio-historically and culturally determined systems of norms and (esthetic) values.

This discussion—as one is conventionally expected to say—"barely scratches the surface" of the issue. The pragmatic analysis of literature is just beginning.

NOTE: For bibliographical references and further discussion about the problems and concepts used in this paper, e.g. those of discourse structure, action, pragmatics, literary structures, etc., see T. A. van Dijk, *Some Aspects of Text Grammars* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972); *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semiotics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (London: Longmans, 1977); and T.A. van Dijk (ed.), *Pragmatics of Language and Literature* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1975).