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Reading Fictional Dialogue:
Reflections on a Cognitive-Pragmatic Reception Theory

In recent years, cognitive approaches to reading fiction have continued and elaborated on previous work in the fields of reception and reader response theories. While there has been empirical work at the boundaries between narratology, linguistics and cognitive psychology with a view to identifying how real readers read (Bortolussi and Dixon 2003; Emmott, Sanford and Morrow 2003; Zwaan 1993), literary-theoretical approaches have sought to trace the interplay between textual features and mental processes that guide readers in their perceptions of fictional characters (Herman 2011; Palmer 2004; Zunshine 2006). The latter approaches typically focus on the presentation of fictional characters' thoughts, feelings, motives, intentions and the like as inferred from narrative presentations of those characters' thought processes but also movements, body language and glances, for example. Such textual cues are typically found in narratorial comments. What happens if such narratorial context is absent in a fictional text, as is, for example, the case with so-called dialogue novels?

In this paper I explore the ways in which readers may read characters' conversations in dialogue novels. Starting out from the premise that reading and understanding fictional dialogue cognitively resembles hearing and interpreting real-life conversations but also involves drawing comparisons with other fictional dialogues one has read (cf. Ralf Schneider's (2001) cognitive theory that involves mental-model construction of characters), I ask to what extent readers can make sense of characters' utterances if those utterances are only minimally embedded in narratorial explanations or not narratively embedded at all. In order to answer this question, I will draw on recent cognitive approaches in pragmatics, which have brought speaker intention into sharper relief. Especially Istvan Kecskes' (2010) socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics will form a backdrop for close linguistic and narratological analyses. This will be supplemented by a discussion of how important it is – despite linguistic methodology borrowed from the analysis of everyday verbal interaction – to attend to the specific *literary* qualities of fictional dialogue, which arguably trigger additional cognitive mechanisms of reception. Here I will critically refer to a recent study by Sven Strasen (2008), who, building on Pilkington (2000) and others, adopted and further modified pragmatic Relevance Theory to propose new ways of theorizing reception. The novel I will use as a test case is Philip Roth's *Deception*. Before I present my argument, I will first briefly outline linguistic and stylistic approaches to the study of fictional dialogue.

Analysing Fictional Dialogue: Linguistic and Stylistic Approaches

In the past, linguistic and stylistic approaches to the study of fictional and dramatic dialogue have made use of conversation-analytical, pragmatic, and socio-, corpus and discourse linguistic frameworks in order to analyse characters' language use and interactions (Culpeper, Short and Verdonk 1998; Culpeper and Kytö 2010; Herman 1995; Leech and Short 2007; Schubert 2012). However, these approaches have been

text-centred and have not prominently addressed the question of readers' cognitive involvement in the understanding and decoding of fictional dialogue. A classic study is Norman Page's book *Speech in the English Novel* (1988), at the centre of which is dialogue's function as a technique of indirect characterization by means of presenting characters' dialect and idiolect. Interestingly, Page already points to the fact that we read fictional characters to some extent as if they were real people although he cautions us to distinguish between the two:

> We identify characters in fiction – as to some extent we do people in real life – by the personal and group characteristics they display; and among these […] speech-characteristics are likely to have special importance. […] character-individuation through dialogue is based on the observable facts of life but often goes a good deal further than most of the examples that life is apt to provide. (Page 1988, 16-17)

Below I will return to the question concerning the differences between fictional and non-fictional dialogue and discuss this with regard to generic functions.

A recent study by Bronwen Thomas (2012) also includes insights from cognitive narratology but because of its wider cultural studies concerns offers more global analyses of fictional dialogues. Thomas traces the "idea of dialogue" in theoretical and fictional texts, thus demonstrating how presentations of dialogue also depend on and perpetuate pre-existing notions of what dialogue is or should be, which values it transports and what gender roles are inscribed in it. Furthermore, Thomas argues for a shift towards "a new approach that allows for the active involvement of the reader in participating in bringing scenes of dialogue to life" (Thomas 2012, 18). However, what exactly this "involvement" looks like remains rather vague. This is where I see a niche for an approach that addresses cognitive as well as linguistic issues at the same time. All of the approaches mentioned so far have their merits and I do not wish to discount any of them in order to propose a new paradigm. On the contrary, I think that the approach suggested in this paper may constitute a welcome addition and supplement to already existing ways of analysing fictional dialogue. To the linguistic/stylistic approaches it adds the cognitive dimension and includes the reader in the equation. To the cognitive-narratological approaches that have focused on characters and their minds it lends a specific angle by picking out characters' verbal interactions for closer study.

Cognitive Pragmatics and Kecskes' Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA)

In recent years, the cognitive turn has also had an impact on pragmatics to the extent that a need has been felt to stress the 'cognitive' as well as the 'pragmatic' side (Nuyts 2004, 138) in what has been a cognitive branch of linguistics all along. Thus, Grice's (1957, 1969) notion of speaker intention has been highlighted (Bara and Ciaramidaro 2010; Haugh 2008), and scholars have stressed the cognitive (and perhaps adaptive) mechanisms underlying human interaction. Levinson's (2006) concept of an "interaction engine" or Bara's (2011) "behaviour games" and "conversation games" are cases in point. The work of Istvan Kecskes builds on this emphatically cognitive approach and further modifies it. His so-called "socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics" (Kecskes 2010; Kecskes and Zhang 2009), SCA in short, offers a dynamic model of communication which pays equal attention to speaker and hearer, societal and individual factors and thus foregrounds the untidy and often problematic nature of communication. As Kecskes puts it, his model "recognizes both regularity and variability

in meaning construction and comprehension, and takes into account both the selective and constitutive roles of context at the same time" (2010, 55). He views communication as the interplay of two inseparable and interactive traits: an "individual trait" and a "social trait" (Kecskes 2010, 58):

Individual trait:	*Social trait*:
attention	intention
private experience	actual situational experience
egocentrism	cooperation
salience	relevance

It may be surprising to see intention listed as part of the social trait. The reason for this is that Kecskes, unlike other pragmatic theorists, does not conceive of intention as a monolithic given which exists in speakers prior to their engagement in conversation and which is then retrieved by hearers but as a property affected by "the dynamism of the conversational flow and the process of formulating an utterance" (Kecskes 2010, 61).[1] I may well begin a conversation with certain intentions in mind but these intentions may shift as I react to what my interlocutor says, how I perceive the conversation to be going, what else comes to my mind and so on.

In order to process intention in a conversation – both as a speaker who formulates intentions and as a hearer who tries to infer or interpret intentions – interlocutors draw on their attentional resources. Attention is attracted and guided by the salience of linguistic or non-linguistic (e.g. situational) pieces of knowledge. Kecskes moves away from standard linguistic definitions of "salience" concerning the accessibility of entities in one's memory and reconceptualises it as "both a stored and emergent entity" (2010, 66) which he further divides into three types: individual, collective and situational (2010, 65). The interplay between salience of knowledge and attention is in turn influenced by three factors: 1. speakers' "knowledge based on prior experience;" 2. "frequency, familiarity, or conventionality of knowledge tied to the situation;" 3. each speaker's "mental state and/or the availability of attentional resources" (2010, 61). So, for example, a verbal exchange that includes greeting and small talk about the weather will require less attention from both speaker and hearer because they can resort to conventionalized linguistic items. These items form the most salient knowledge available at the time. If, by contrast, a speaker unexpectedly moves away from the underlying script in a given situation – perhaps because something else in the situation or something the other person said has become more salient and has therefore redirected the speaker's attention – it may be less easy for the interlocutor to process the speaker's utterance. This is also because speakers' knowledge will partially derive from their private context (which contains both individual-specific and 'public,' i.e. relatively conventionalized, knowledge that can therefore be known by others, too) and partially from the situational context (2010, 64-65; cf. also Kecskes 2008). Furthermore, intentions may or may not emerge in the verbal interaction.

More importantly, speakers' and hearers' knowledge as well as language use may diverge and may ultimately lead to communication problems. This is, according to Kecskes, because cooperation is *not* the key to communication, as has been claimed time and again by Grice and his followers, but because egocentrism plays a vital role, too:

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1   For a similarly critical view and redefinition of "intention," see Haugh (2008).

> In SCA, *speaker's utterance* is a full proposition in its own right, operating with speaker-centered pragmatic enhancement and speaker's intention in order to satisfy primarily the speaker's agenda. The full proposition the speaker puts out in this scenario will not necessarily mean the same as that which is recovered by the hearer: interlocutors have different privatized background knowledge and experience, they may perceive the actual situational contexts differently, use lexical items in different sense and in general, differ greatly as to what is salient for them and to what extent. (Kecskes 2010, 64; emphasis in the original)

The egocentric part in communication will cause interlocutors to "*bring up the most salient information to the needed attentional level*" (61, emphasis in the original), perhaps disregarding what might be most salient for the other person. Here, Kecskes' approach also deviates from Relevance Theory, which posits that relevance is a unified constraint underlying and regulating all communication (Sperber and Wilson 1995). By contrast, relevance in SCA is a pragmatic effect depending on the speaker's intention (Kecskes 2010, 59). If speakers choose not to be relevant this can lead to misunderstanding, miscommunication or even communication breakdown. In other words, the success of communication will depend on whether the balance is tipped towards the individual rather than the social trait. I think this emphasis on the interplay between conflicting mechanisms in communication is very attractive for the analysis of fictional and dramatic dialogue since more often than not literary dialogues present problematic talk – otherwise there would not be much point in presenting it at all.[2]

Applying Kecskes' Model to Fictional Dialogue: Philip Roth's *Deception*

So how can the linguistic model just delineated be applied to fictional dialogue and what does it tell us about how readers read such dialogue? At the level of the characters, one can use the model to analyse the dynamics of minds in verbal interaction. This involves a micro-level, turn-by-turn analysis as will be demonstrated below. At the level of real readers, I argue, similar mechanisms apply, albeit at one remove: to my mind it would be incorrect to claim that readers experience those conversations as if they themselves were interlocutors participating in them. Rather, readers become immersed in the (dialogical) storyworld (Ryan 2001) but they always also inhabit what one could consider a 'meta-position' from which they engage in the presented conversation as an *outside* observer, not as a participant on a par with the characters. They take into view both dialogue partners and attend not only to their individual

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2   As Thomas points out "the notion that thoughts and emotions can be communicated either to others or to oneself unproblematically and coherently is often put to the test in novels that trade for the purposes of humor or suspense on the verbal inadequacies of characters or which powerfully hint at the characters' alienation from the social settings in which they find themselves" (2012, 7). A conscious and deliberate form of conflict talk is what has been called "verbal duelling" (cf. McDowell 1985). Repartees have had a long tradition in both drama and the novel and, Thomas argues, resemble "Socratic dialogues in the way opposing arguments or philosophies are balanced against one another, with the characters devoting all of their energies and drawing on all of their verbal skills to try to gain the upper hand" (2012, 75). Kecskes of course does not necessarily have such elaborate examples in mind. His main concern is with the "trial-and-error process" (Kecskes 2010, 69) at the core of everyday verbal interaction.

turns but to their interaction as a holistic composition that gradually emerges in the reading process.[3]

In this context Wolfgang Iser's concept of a reader's perspective ("Leserblick-punkt") which a literary text has to afford readers in order to impact on them in their reading experience is interesting (Iser 1976, 246). Iser argues that this reader's per-spective need not be determined by the real-life experiences and backgrounds of pos-sible readers. If a text presupposes such specific backgrounds there are bound to be problems of misunderstanding because not all readers will share that background knowledge (Iser 1976, 247). On this count, what Iser says corresponds to Kecskes' communication model: when reading fictional dialogue, readers can also be said to be egocentric and to bring to bear on the text what is most salient to *them* as well as their private knowledge concerning conversational interactions. Not only will they try to infer what the presented characters intend to say and do (and thus be cooperative) but they will also be hampered by their own predispositions and consequently perhaps misunderstand or misread what is presented to them. This risk is possibly greater in dialogue novels that are almost entirely divested of narratorial framing, as is the case with Philip Roth's *Deception*.

As Schneider (2001, 625) contends, extensive use of dialogue in novels blocks easy categorization of characters. Instead, characters have to be personalized from the bottom up, which requires heightened awareness (Kecskes' "attention") on the part of the reader. Roth's novel presents the main protagonist, writer Philip, in "duologues" (Thomas 2012, 36) with friends and acquaintances, with various lovers and with his wife:

> Creating the effect of intimacy, as though we are overhearing private conversations, the implication is that we are being given privileged access to the characters and have all that we could possibly require for understanding their emotions and motivations. (Thomas 2012, 68).

More often than not, however, the reader faces the difficulty of having to figure out who is currently talking, what the situational context is, and how the characters are related to one another. Towards the end it then transpires that the conversations ap-pear in a notebook kept by Philip, and Philip has an argument with his wife about whether these transcripts are based on real conversations (which would imply his recurrent infidelity as well as his negative feelings towards his wife and her family) or whether they have merely been imagined or invented by Philip. I will return to the complexity of this presentation of dialogue below. For the moment, however, let us have a closer look at the beginning of the conversation Philip has with his wife:

> "You better tell me what's upsetting you so. I cannot come home from my studio every day and sit down to dinners like this night after night. You don't speak. You don't re-spond to anything I say. And you look awful."
> "I don't sleep."
> "Why don't you? Tell me."
> "I don't know."

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3   Here, one probably has to distinguish between different types of readers with differing degrees of theoretical training and reading experience, which to a greater or lesser extent enables them to zoom out in order to get the bigger picture. However, Schneider (2001, 626) points out that a theoretically informed top-down approach to literary characters can also be delimiting since the focus on certain features that are relevant for one's theory may obscure other interesting facets.

"What's bothering you?"
"It's nothing to do with you."
"That's no reason not to tell me. It *does* have to do with me, doesn't it?"
"I want to know – no, I don't, I don't want to know!"
"Oh, here we go. What *is* it?"
"You do not go off to your studio to work – you go off to your studio to fuck! You are having an affair with someone in your studio!"
"Oh, do I? Am I?"
Bursting into tears. "Yes!"
"The only woman in my studio is the woman in my novel, unfortunately. It would be nicer with company but it doesn't work that way."
"Not your novel – your notebook! You left it out of your briefcase and I picked it up and stupidly – and now I wish I never had! I *knew* not to open that – I knew it would be awful!"
"You are working yourself into a state over nothing, you know."
"Am I?"
"Well, what do you think? You happen to have read some notes – "
"Not 'notes' – conversations with this woman!"
"Who is imaginary."
[…]
"You do – you do – " Crying bitterly.
"Do what?"
"You love her more than you ever loved me!"
"*Because she doesn't exist*! If you didn't exist I'd love you like that too. I can't believe that we are having this argument."
"We're having it because you are lying!"
"Really, this is too stupid."   (Roth 1990, 173-175)

Philip begins the conversation by reacting to the sad looks of his wife. His attention is drawn to something non-verbal in the situational context. When he asks her to tell him "what's upsetting you so" he presupposes that she is in fact upset. That a husband asks his wife what is wrong with her is perfectly normal in spousal communication, so this initially triggers situational and linguistic knowledge both partners (and by extension the reader) can map onto their previous private and shared experiences. However, when Philip lists all the things he perceives to be wrong with his wife ("You don't speak…") his intention is not merely to try and help her to open up to him so he can then comfort her. His agenda is more egocentric. He reproaches his wife for being in such a bad mood because this spoils his evenings for him: "I cannot come home from my studio every day and sit down to dinners like this […]." When Philip tells his wife that she looks awful he formulates an insult, not only implying that she is unattractive for him but that she furthermore has herself to blame for not letting off steam. Philip's wife reacts to this insult accordingly: "I don't sleep." She recognizes that the conversation has become confrontational and uses her attentional resources to find words for her defence, while at the same time trying to deflect attention from her real feelings and the reasons behind them (see also her "I don't know" or "It's nothing to do with you").

To the extent that she assumes a defensive discursive position, the wife is cooperative in this argumentative speech situation because she adheres to one possible or expected speech pattern, exploiting "the defensive benefit of indirectness" (Tannen 2005, 20). However, by initially holding back relevant information (what *really* upsets her) she also follows her own agenda in an egocentric way in order to protect

herself. This leads to communication problems. Given Philip's presentation in other dialogues throughout the novel, it is safe to assume that his wife can draw on prior private knowledge of similar situations and thus infer for the actual situational experience that he is likely going to be a severe and unrelenting dialogue partner. In this regard, the reader as an outside observer undergoes similar cognitive-pragmatic processes: we also have a heightened awareness of the upcoming conflict because of the wording of Philip's utterances. And we too draw upon prior experiential knowledge, in this case our experience of Philip in dialogic interaction.

There are a number of speech cut-offs, especially in the wife's utterances, which point to difficulties in verbalizing one's feelings or thoughts. Thus, she starts to say what bothers her only to be stopped in her tracks again: "I want to know – no, I don't, I don't want to know!" Whatever it is she wanted to say is too painful to talk about. The exclamation mark here and elsewhere in the dialogue signal to the reader that the respective utterances are spoken emphatically, thus pointing to the speakers' agitation and anger. Philip's response ("Oh, here we go.") indicates that he now expects trouble talk to erupt. His wife's utterance has drawn his attention more poignantly to the fact that things are not right. His own speech becomes emphatic in turn, as can be seen in the use of italic type: "What *is* it?" This time, Philip's wife cooperates because she answers her husband's question. Her accusation that Philip is having an affair is direct and confident because it is presented as an assertion rather than, say, a question. Philip responds in what at first sight seems to be an irrelevant manner by asking "Oh, do I? Am I?" In terms of information management this is ludicrous because if anyone is to know whether Philip has an affair or not it is he himself. His 'questions' therefore assume another meaning, implying a cynical verbal challenge along the lines of "How do you know?" or "What makes you think so?".

The wife's emotional reaction, her crying, forces Philip to adjust his verbal strategy. He is now the one to go into self-defence mode, trying to explain that the other woman is only part of his fiction and that what his wife has read are merely notes. On the surface, Philip's behaviour becomes more 'social' but certain word choices indicate that underlying this rhetorical surface he still pursues an egotistical agenda that aims at hurting his wife. Thus, when he explains that the other woman is only a character in his novel, he adds the adverb "unfortunately" in a marked syntactical position in the end (extraposition), thus implying that it would actually be enjoyable to have an affair. It could also be a cynical rejoinder to his wife's accusation in the sense of "Unfortunately you are not right." Either way, this is a verbal counterattack rather than an attempt at pacifying his wife. She reacts in a corresponding manner by also being combative. Here and later she contests her husband's word choices (she talks about "notebook" instead of "novel" and "conversations" instead of "notes") because those different words also involve another interpretation and presentation of the facts: while his words suggest the fictionality of the mentioned dialogues, her words claim that the dialogues have truth-value and are taken from real-life encounters.

When the wife explains how she came to read Philip's notebook the recurring speech cut-offs once again point to her agitation and her reluctance to verbalize what is so painful to her. Philip's reaction to his wife's (verbal and non-verbal) behaviour is to diminish her feelings: "You are working yourself into a state over nothing, you know." The word "nothing" also minimizes her accusation, implying that these accusations are unfounded. A similar strategy is used at the end of this excerpt when

Philip verbally brushes off his wife's accusation that he is lying by disqualifying either her accusation or their entire conversation as "too stupid." Another of Philip's responses is particularly interesting from a pragmatic perspective. To his wife's claim that he loves the other woman more than her (a conclusion she drew from the way Philip wrote about the other woman), he answers: "*Because she doesn't exist. If you didn't exist I'd love you like that too. I can't believe that we are having this argument.*" The causal clause presupposes that he loves the other woman. At the same time he denies her existence. By means of the propositions expressed in the subsequent conditional sentence, he indirectly even admits that he does not love his wife or at least not as passionately as he loves this 'fantasy woman.' The perlocutionary force behind this sentence is no longer based on mere self-defence but clearly represents an outright verbal attack meant to hurt his wife emotionally.

This example shows very neatly the mechanisms explained in Kecskes' communication model. We as readers can infer the speakers' intentions on account of their utterances and see how the characters themselves react to each other's shifting verbal strategies in the current conflict situation. They draw on their attentional resources to find the most salient linguistic items to fulfil their respective agendas while responding to the other person, constantly moving between cooperation and egocentrism. Both also use their knowledge of prior conversations to make predictions about the situation at hand. This explains, for example, the wife's initial reluctance to start the argument and Philip's quick recognition of the fact that this is a conflict situation. We as readers can likewise draw on our previous experiences of marital rows like this one, either those we have had ourselves or those we have read about in other novels, for example. And we contextualize this particular verbal exchange by reading it against the backdrop of previous dialogues in the same novel, which have already given us a flavour of Philip and his wife as conversational partners. However, this is not all we do.

The Limits and Promises of an SCA Reception Theory

So far I have presented the socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics as a particularly suitable candidate for a reception theory concerning the ways readers read fictional dialogue even (or especially) in cases where those dialogues are stripped of narratorial commentary. I am a bit wary of extending this to a more general reception-theoretical approach because even with fictional dialogue readers presumably do more than just use their communicational resources and knowledge about conversations to understand the presented dialogues. Again, Roth's novel offers examples. Thus, many of the conversations presented in the novel appear to be very stylized and sometimes they are somewhat odd. For example, in one dialogue we are presented with what is obviously a fantasy scenario, where Philip finds himself in front of a court of law to defend himself against the accusation that he is misogynistic in his writing. The scene becomes more and more ludicrous and apparently culminates in Philip making love to the prosecutor, a beautiful woman, right there in the courtroom (Roth 1990, 107-111). This scenario calls to mind a similarly grotesque courtroom scene in James Joyce's phantasmagoric 'Circe' episode in *Ulysses*, where Bloom is accused, among other things, of having committed plagiarism and of having seduced several women (Joyce 1992, 584-598). Drawing such intertextual connections requires more than simply different background knowledge, literary training or the like. It also requires an ability

to think in analogies and to identify correspondences. Not only does specialized knowledge about other literary texts have to be salient enough to be activated in my current reading experience, I also need to have a certain curiosity or some other motivation to start searching for corresponding textual examples in my memory. Perhaps a reception model that is based on a communication model surrounding everyday conversational utterances is not fully adequate to capture the potential complexity of reading literary texts. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

Another problem arises because fictional dialogues often assume functions that go well beyond the functions of talk-in-interaction, which ultimately has to do with generic differences. Right at the beginning of Roth's novel, for example, Philip and his lover play what they call the "Middle-Aged-Lovers-Dreaming-About-Running-Away-Together-Questionnaire" (Roth 1990, 3), which involves asking one another questions about each other's personalities, what they think the other person is like, whether they tell lies, and so on. While it is certainly possible to have such a conversation in real life – where presumably its main function would be that the interlocutors try to gauge to what extent they can trust and rely on the other person – the main purpose of this dialogue right at the beginning of Roth's novel is to introduce the reader to two central characters, and to some of the major themes: adultery and interpersonal relationships, deception and lying, Philip's obsession with Jewishness, midlife crisis. In other words, the dialogue fulfils text-internal functions which are closely related to the work's overall composition. Similarly, the two lovers later play yet another verbal game, where the woman has to close her eyes and describe Philip's study from memory (Roth 1990, 33-36). Strangely, her description is extremely precise and detailed. Now again, this kind of game is possible but it is more likely that Roth included it here to give the reader an impression of what the setting looks like. In a way, the function of this verbal exchange is similar to the function which word painting had in Elizabethan drama.

Another quasi-dramatic dialogue-within-the-dialogue can be found when Philip asks his lover to play "reality shift" (Roth 1990, 94). This is some kind of play-acting where Philip plays himself and his lover pretends to be his biographer, interviewing Philip, the writer. The function of this game obviously is to provide the reader with more background information about the main protagonist. Hilariously, a lot of this biographical information is related to the real author's, Philip Roth's, life. Thus, the dialogue is also used for a postmodern play with fact and fiction, novel and autobiography, authenticity and deception typical of Roth's work (Tuerk 2005). After all, even the 'conversations' that we first come across turn out to be the protagonist's notes and the only question that is left unanswered (and thus makes the whole novel deceptive) is whether these notes are quasi transcripts from remembered conversations or whether Philip has only made them up. In any case, they are written versions of dialogue and thus already quite removed from the messier, usually unpremeditated conversations we find in our everyday lives. In this sense, Roth's novel also highlights the constructedness of novelistic dialogue.

Conclusion and Outlook

My discussion hitherto suggests that fictional dialogue operates on at least two levels: on one level it is – at least on the surface – sufficiently similar to real-life conversations to warrant its analysis with tools which are normally applied to the study of

meaning-making in real utterances. It makes sense to assume that, when we read fictional dialogue, similar cognitive processes are triggered as when we overhear real conversations or engage in conversations ourselves, for example. This explains why even in the absence of narratorial commentary we are able to infer to a certain extent what characters intend to say and do in their verbal interactions. Inversely and some-what paradoxically, this also explains why pure dialogue novels often cause readers difficulty: it is precisely the narratorial commentary which usually provides us with information that, in a real conversational situation, we would be able to gain from the situational context, e.g. non-verbal cues such as the interlocutors' facial expressions, glances and body language but also prosody and tone of voice.[4] This is the experiential side to fictional dialogue.

However, on another level fictional dialogues – and by extension, fictional texts – are aesthetic written constructs which internally follow genre-specific rules and textual mechanisms and which externally establish relationships with other more or less similar texts of their kind. Understanding such constructions involves complex text processing mechanisms (cf. also Schneider 2001), which, to my mind, ought to be included in a reception theory for literary texts. Perhaps another linguistic area one could turn to here is text linguistics. After all, scholars in this research tradition also try to explain how cohesion on the textual level and coherence as mental processing of logical connections interact so that readers can make sense of texts (Bublitz, Lenk and Ventola 1999).

Strasen (2008) argues in his overview of more recent reception-theoretical approaches that it is desirable to find a reception theory which presupposes the same decoding or processing mechanisms for the retrieval of meaning in texts as are used for the retrieval of information more generally.[5] He proposes pragmatic Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) as a theory of communication that could be the basis of such a reception theory because it feasibly explains the basic cognitive mechanisms underlying successful (face-to-face) communication. However, because Relevance Theory actually remains quiet about more complex meaning systems such as literary texts and because it more or less ignores questions of socio-cultural contexts and ideology, Strasen combines it with Zwaan's (1996, 241) notion of "control systems," which are said to guide readers because of repeated previous exposure to similar (literary) texts. I can see the attractiveness in breaking parameters down to a common denominator. However, the question arises as to what heuristic value is gained by doing this. More concretely, how can a reception theory that has been pared down to such a basic level be helpful for understanding or analysing literary works? To give an analogy: this would be as much as to argue that cycling and ballet dancing are ultimately the same because they involve motor skills, the coordination of body movements and physical fitness. One would of course ignore the fact that ballet dancing requires *special* coordination of body movements in tune with music, a feeling for rhythm on the part of the dancer, a talent for making difficult movements appear effortless and, most importantly, an expressivity that creates an *aesthetic experience*. Literary texts – which are undoubtedly related to everyday communication on the

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4 Needless to say that narratorial commentary in novels often even provides us with information we can never hope to be given in real-life conversations, e.g. what exactly the interlocutors are currently thinking.

5 This is reminiscent of Bruno Bara's (2011) consideration of resemblances between the cognitive processes involved in verbal and non-verbal communication.

grounds that both participate in and make use of language – also do more than utterances spoken in talk-in-interaction. It is legitimate to treat them as equal and to borrow and exchange analytical tools from their respective proper research paradigms as far as the disciplines involved can learn something from one another. At the same time, one should not lose sight of generic distinctions and of what makes each respective area of language use special and different. Nevertheless, if one insists that literary communication and other forms of communication are at bottom quite similar (albeit not the same!) then Kecskes' communication model might perhaps be a more useful component in a new reception-theoretical framework because it presents a dynamic model of communication that hinges around the interplay between the above-mentioned individual and social traits, with equal emphasis on both speaker and hearer.

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