intertextuality

Lesson 10
INTERTEXTUALITY

The term subsumes the ways in which the production and reception of a given text depend upon the participants’ knowledge of other texts.

This knowledge can be applied by a process describable in terms of MEDIATION (the extent to which one feeds one’s current beliefs and goals into the model of the communicative situation).
Different conceptions of intertextuality

Broad

– Meaning does not reside within texts as isolated objects, but in their relations with previous propositions, texts, discourses, cliches, stereotypes, and systems of meaning which make up culture (Bakhtin, Kristeva, Barthes, relying on Saussure’s conception of the linguistic sign as “a non-unitary, non-stable, relational unity, the understanding of which leads us out into the vast network of relations, of similarity and difference, which constitutes the synchronic system of language” (Allen 2011: 11).

– *Mediation* between current communicative situation and expectations about prototypical *text-types* (A text type is a class of texts expected to have certain traits for certain purposes, and hence acts as a prominent determiner of efficiency, effectiveness, and appropriateness.) De-Beaugrande/Dressler. Similar to the notion of ‘genre’.

– *Text allusion*: the ways people use or refer to well-known texts

Narrow
Text allusion: a literary example

- Around 1600, Christopher Marlowe wrote the plea of a ‘passionate shepherd to his love’, beginning:
  
  Come live with me and be my love,
  And we will all the pleasures prove
  That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
  Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

- Soon after, Sir Walter Raleigh penned ‘the nymph’s reply to the shepherd’:
  
  If all the world and love were young,
  And truth in every shepherd’s tongue,
  These pretty pleasures might me move
  To live with thee and be thy love.

- Around 1612, John Donne borrowed Marlowe’s general scheme for a proposal of an improbable fisherman, beginning:
  
  Come live with me and be my love,
  And we will all the pleasures prove,
  Of golden sands and crystal brooks:
  With silken lines, and silver hooks.

- The fisherman suggests that by undressing and bathing in the river, the young lady will attract ‘each fish, which every channel hath’ and hence make it possible to dispense with fishing tackle.
Around 1935, Cecil Day Lewis wrote an ironic new version in which the speaker is an unskilled labourer, beginning:

Come, live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
of peace and plenty, bed and board,
That chance employment may afford.
I’ll handle dainties on the docks
And thou shalt read of summer frocks:
At evening by the sour canals
We’ll hope to hear some madrigals.

The force of this text is its opposition to the very principles and conventions underlying Marlowe’s original
• Cecil Day Lewis’s poem is far more devastating than Raleigh’s rebuttal or Donne’s sarcasm, because it attacks that whole alternativity relationship upon which the literary status of Marlowe’s text was based;

• Raleigh and Donne had mocked the shepherd’s proposals, not Marlowe’s mode of selecting and communicating about a topic.
What is a meme?

- The word *meme* is a shortening (modeled on *gene*) of the Greek *mimeme*, meaning *imitated thing*.
- According to Merriam-Webster, a meme is "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture."
- An Internet meme can be defined as a text that derives its humor from one or more levels of intertextuality. It may take the form of an image, hyperlink, video, picture, website, or hashtag or just be a word or phrase, including an intentional misspelling.
- Memes are created and spread on social networks and communities and evolve over time.

Courtesy of Valeria Ciccotti, LM1 2013-14
Intertextuality in IM communication: snowclones

• **Snowclones** are a type of phrasal templates in which certain words may be replaced with another to produce new variations with altered meanings. Although freeform parody of quotes from popular films, music and TV shows is a fairly common theme in Internet humor, snowclones usually adhere to a particular format or arrangement order which may be reduced down to a grammatical formula with one or more custom variables.

• The term “snowclone” was coined by American linguists Geoffrey K. Pullum and Glen. Pullum asserted there has been a growing need of a descriptor for overused phrasal templates or journalism cliches:

• *It now occurs to me that we also need a name for another linguistic figure, [...] not yet named. Roughly speaking, the thing we need a name for is a multi-use, customizable, instantly recognizable, time-worn, quoted or misquoted phrase or sentence that can be used in an entirely open array of different jokey variants by lazy journalists and writers.*

• E.g. “It’s the economy, stupid"
“One Does Not Simply Walk into Mordor” (snowclone) is a memorable quote from the 2001 fantasy epic film *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. In the scene, the Council of Elrond reveals that an evil ring must be destroyed by being thrown into the fires of Mount Doom, a volcano deep in the territory of Mordor. Boromir promptly points out the difficulty of the task by saying, “One does not simply walk into Mordor.”
In the “One does not simply X into Mordor” snowclone, the word “walk” is typically substituted with another verb which is often related to the subject of an image. The variation “One dos not simply walk into Y”, swaps “Mordor” with another location that has relevance to the situation depicted in the image.
Sometimes memes can be used in written communication without the attached picture but just as text, and decoding the intended meaning might be difficult.

- I’ve been in Rome last weekend, but the city is so big…
- Big city is big.
- Ain’t nobody got time for that.
- U jelly?
• «big city is big» is an example of a meme called Redundant adjectives are redundant, also know as «X Y is X», which derives from an episode of the Simpsons aired in 1999. The original quote was: «fun toys are fun!»
• «ain’t nobody got time for that» is a quotation of Sweet Brown, an Oklahoma city resident who was interviewed after evacuating from her apartment building that was set on fire in 2012. Her interview was remixed several times and went viral on youtube and other networks.
• U Jelly? is an online catchphrase used as a shorthand for «you jealous?». Outside of the Internet, one early reference to being jelly, as in jealous, can be found in the 1999 Beatnuts single “Watch Out Now”.
Text allusion in IM communication: a case-study

Intertextual reference to TV series Ashes to Ashes, with Cameron as Detective Hunt.

Spoof/Parody

1. an intentional verbal representation of some prior action or event,
2. the flaunting of (1),
3. the critical act, and
4. the comic act.
Parody of the classical political proposition “vote for me, and I will fix things for you”

Parody of the parody
• Non-bona-fide markers
  – Co-textual: payoff (I changed my ad agency, I can change the country)
  – Informational: argument does not warrant the conclusion, exploitation of maxim of relation
More examples

We can't go on like this. I'll cut the deficit, not the NHS.

Some of my best friends are poor.

Yo plebs, we is all in distancing together, yeah?
Other examples: source texts...

“I’ve never voted Tory before, but we’ve got to mend our broken society.”

“I’ve never voted Tory before, and now I can join the BNP!”

“I’ve never voted Tory before, but we need to sort out the economy.”

“I’ve never voted Tory before, but being made unemployed sounds fun.”
I've never voted for Christmas before, but we all need to accept savage cuts.