

## Metatext in the Discourse of the Theory of Text, Stylistics and Pragmalinguistics\*

The category expressed in the title – introduced to textual research almost thirty years ago by Anna WIERZBICKA (1971) – even if obligatorily present in almost every discourse analysis, has not been given a precise definition. The notion appeared at the moment of verbalisation of new theoretical expectations (these were the beginnings of scientific interest towards the issues of textual structures), and it has exceeded the borders of the discipline which has adapted the term to its requirements. Nowadays, the notion of “metatext” is often used not only by textual linguists, but also by researchers of other disciplines: theory and criticism of literature, stylistics, pragmalinguistics, adding to the already great register of vague notions related to the textual category new ones, containing the component *meta*: “metaprose” (SCHOLES, 1983), “metafiction”, “metanarration” (CZAPLIŃSKI, 1997), “metadiscourse” (DUSZAK, 1998: 35), “metadescription” (WITOSZ, 2000), “metaillocution” (KAWKA, 1990: 27), “metamessage” (TANNEN, 1986), “genre metatext” (KALAGA, forthcoming) etc.<sup>1</sup> or, as in the recently discussed classification of Gérard GENETTE (1992), it gives a new range to the “old” name.<sup>2</sup>

Metatext – created on the basis of the term “metalanguage”<sup>3</sup>, existent in logics and linguistics – was initially treated in the preliminary period of textual theory analyses as **one of the components of a linguistic message** of a highly specialized (coherent) function. The acknowledgment of the heterogeneous and complex nature of the subject of linguistic

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<sup>1</sup> The notions: *metafiction*, *metaprose*, *metanarration*, *metadescription* refer to artistic texts, in which one may notice disclosure of the writing strategy by naming rules – constructive and receiving – upon which the text has been created (genre rules, esthetic and literary conventions), by disclosing the fictional character of a statement, by underlining (showing references to other texts) its intertextual potential. Another way of explaining the sense of the prefix *meta-* is presented by the followers of the notions *metadiscourse* and *metaillocution*: it refers to the inclusion of the category of subject of a given statement, his knowledge, beliefs, intentions towards the recipient, expressed values etc. into the text surface.

<sup>2</sup> The range of the traditionally intended category of metatext was divided in Genette’s typology into two types: paratext (where some elements of a text comment the “proper” text, e.g.: title, subtitle, introduction, index) and metatext (where one text is a commentary to a different text, e.g. a review). In this typology, all the metatextual operators, bound with the substantive layer of a statement, which from the beginning of the theory of text were the basic subject-matter of linguistics, were omitted (GENETTE, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Differences in defining metalanguage between logicians, e.g. H. Reichenbach or G. Frege, and linguists, especially R. Jakobson, are better described by M. KAWKA (1990: 15–29; Also cf. OŽÓG, 1990, 1991; KITA, 1996).

analyses (text) has embedded the notion in question with the categories of polifony (BACH-TIN, 1970: 11; DUCROT, 1989; MARKIEWICZ, 1989; KAŁKOWSKA, 1996; GRZENIA 1999: 38 ff.), multidimensionality (INGARDEN, 1960: 53), heterogeneity, which were used to define various features of texts, such as: multiplicity of voices, modality, levels of speech, resulting from the fact that the subject structurizes the message in layers, already expressed judgments are being completed with further ones, commenting the content that has appeared before, indicating to the recipient the importance of particular statements etc. Recently, more often is heterogeneity understood as a plethora of text types, which are mutually intrinsic and create a “multilingual” tissue of a statement. Thus, the notion of heterogeneous structure of a text is linked to categories, such as genre and style syncretism. The category of multidimensionality of texts, accepted and exposed in a theoretical discourse, has been however reduced and limited (just like in logical definitions) to just two levels in analytic research: the layer of substantial statement and the *meta* level covering the first level. Such a simplification in the description of the statement structure, which does not discern e.g. the “levelling” of a text from the “levelling” of a sentence in the text, constitutes – as I maintain – one of the causes of obscurities and oblique situations around metatext. I shall indicate some of the latter in this paper; however, I shall not perform a complete description or evaluation of them. Furthermore, it is not my goal to “correct” the functioning definitions of metatext so that they could fulfill the methodological demand of establishing distinct boundaries between the ranges of the notions, for I consider valid the vagueness of both the category of text as well as of the categories related to it. I focus on this issue because I have been observing that linguistic disciplines which analyse texts: theory of text, stylistics and pragmalinguistics define the relation between the metatextual layer and the level of substantive statement differently. It obviously leads to constant extension of the range of the notion in question. It may cause analytical anxiety and a need of methodological desambiguation. For this reason, I shall treat this paper as one of opinions in the discussion over the model and the language of description of the complex textual structure.

In terms of Polish textual theory research, it has become commonly accepted (cf. URBAŃCZYK, ed., 1992: 199) to consider, after WIERZBIĆKA (1971: 106), the metatext “a statement on a statement, a comment on a statement.” A narrower definition of metatext is presented by Teresa Dobrzyńska: it is “a statement, whose topic is the text itself” (DOBRYŃSKA, 1993), “a type of predicate that appears in the whole linguistic message, unifying it and indicating its boundaries” (DOBRYŃSKA, 1978: 103).

Initially, metatext was treated as a vague notion, for it normally contained in its range various verbalisations (words, expressions, phrases, sequences of statements), situated both at the statement level and at the textual level. It is worth mentioning that although the notion of metatext has been created for the description of the text-forming purpose of linguistic units, the disclosure of the *meta* function exceeds the range of lexical and syntactical units. Information of such a kind also transmits text components related to its physical features: acoustic – in a spoken statement; or graphical and typographical – in a written one. An example of such could be a paragraph or space as signals for the beginning of a new text; brackets as a graphical sign of parenthesis, that, by dividing a statement into two parts, informs the recipient that the message in brackets is less important than the

rest of a given sentence (GROCHOWSKI, 1983); quotation mark as a sign of quoting a different text (MAYENOWA, 1974) etc.

The criterion which allows to enclose such different elements in one set is constituted by the function which is ascribed to all of them – the control of the interpretation of a statement. Let us try to define the character of the aforesaid interpretation, primarily indicating those text-forming actions to be discussed in the parts on metatext.

Undoubtedly, metatext refers to the text in such a way that it shows its constitutive features. For the theory of text, the supposition on the intentional and holistic character of a message is essential (DOBRYŃSKA, 1974, 1978, 1993; BACHTIN, 1986). Thus, it is natural to show interest towards the indicators of the boundaries of a statement. The metatextual component introduces also the topic, discloses the rules of text organisation by indicating equivalence or rules of hierarchization, types of references between sentences; in short – “it doubles [...] actions performed by the speaker just by uttering the rest of words of a given text” (WIERZBICKA, 1971: 118).

It is deemed undisputed that a metatextual statement discloses **the subject as the sender and the creator of a given text**. The connection between the *meta* plan and the sender category (author of the text) illustrates a particularly visible type of metatext accumulated in the parts that delimitate a statement: title, introduction, index, footnote etc. These structures, situated at the borders of a statement, although considered its integral components, are often defined (in: HARWEG, 1968: 150 ff.) as “external metatext” – etic, however, recently more often (in: GENETTE, 1992) as “paratext” in contrast to “internal metatext” – emic, embedded with the space of the “proper” text. If the “metatextual” status of the external indicators has not been considered controversial, one must agree that the internal “metatext”, which accompanies the statements on the reality, has become a research subject both interesting and troublesome for textologists.

We should remember – following the proposition of WIERZBICKA (1971) – that a metatextual commentary is created by statement components that include **the sender’s strategy towards the subject**, that is to say elements informing on the relation between the sender and his/her own statement, the world represented and the recipient. According to Wierzbicka, each internally dialogued statement in the understanding of Bahtin, e.g. those which contain the lexical indicator of modality (*supposedly, probably, as if*), performative verb (*I promise, I swear, I protest* etc.) receives the status of „metatextuality” due to its heterogeneous, “bitextual” nature. Metatext – in this understanding – includes in its range at least part of issues concerning the category of modality (in many works the notions: “modal frame” and “metatextual frame” are used interchangeably), emotions, illocution and presupposition (KAWKA, 1990; WITOSZ, 1996; STARZEC, 1999). Thus, the following question seems essential: Can the name “metatext” encompass all possible attitudes of the speaker towards communicated judgments, expressed opinions, acts of will and emotions? The answer could, perhaps, determine relations between the semantic category of modality and the *meta* level in a text more precisely. One must admit that multiple times authors of textologic works express their doubts when it comes to signal which one of text contents should be ascribed the *meta* function (GROCHOWSKI, 1983; KAWKA, 1990; WITOSZ, 1996; STARZEC, 1999); however – as the reading of their verbalisation shows – they are generally limited to a conclusion that the proper stand-

ing of a given author should be treated “solely as a starting point for further research” (GROCHOWSKI, 1983: 257).

Let us reflect on the phenomenon of parenthesis. It seems that a common opinion presented in linguistic works following Maciej GROCHOWSKI (1983), that parenthesis is one of the indicators of metatext, requires more complex analysis. I wonder if it is actually true that every type of parenthesis belongs to the *meta* layer. Parentheses differ from one another both in terms of their formal structure and their content. Some of them are undoubtedly a commentary to the main text; nevertheless, some introduce new information, which becomes present only in course of formulating a statement and added to the latter. We should remember that a text is a multidimensional structure composed of other texts – uttered by the same sender but from a different position; moreover, it is also composed of statements of other subjects. It is interesting that quotations usually do not raise suspicion from the interpretative point of view. Such a quoted statement is currently considered a separate text, another voice, the function of a metastatement is ascribed solely to the narrative elements introducing such another voice (they let us become oriented on the receiver in the message structure). Thus, if we want to consider *meta* indicators only those signals which indicate “the text as a text” and in which the sender exposes himself as its author (taking responsibility for its structure), parenthesis only overlaps metatext, but it is not encompassed in total by the latter. I think that the metatextual dimension may be attributed to **the decision** of the sender to **distinguish** (with brackets or other graphic signs) or to introduce parenthetical information – as a background one or formulated in a parallel manner to the main body of the text – on another layer (not necessarily the metatextual one) of a multidimensional text. Parenthetical information itself, on the other hand, may play various roles towards the contents layer, but it cannot be only metatextual.

At this point, I would like to turn back to the problem indicated at the beginning of this paper, which regards the multidimensionality of the text. On one hand, within the whole text, differentiation of the structure of a statement, which Anna KAŁKOWSKA (1996) calls the syntactical levelling of a sentence, occurs. It means that some components of a statement are translocated to a different semantic level (parenthesis, dislocated expressions, traditionally defined as syntactical anticipation, emphatic structures, modulants). On the other hand, within one statement, we may encounter multiplicity of voices (subjects) and types of texts (polyphony, genre and style syncretism). The metatextual function should be thus ascribed to such expressions whose role consists in defining **the relation** between particular levels of a statement (including the statement level as a component of a given text) and in **binding** these various levels and different texts situated at different levels in a heterogeneous yet coherent text.

Let us move to reflections over other issues. I think that it is essential to resolve the question of interpreting the function of commenting one's own statement – should the commenting role be limited to express opinions on the structure and the function, or should it also include content elements? At the same time, the contents layer of a given statement should be analyzed. Notwithstanding our great will to limit the scope of metatext, it is difficult not to agree with T. Dobrzyńska's stance that often “the interpretation of a literary text discloses [...] hidden metatextual references of motives belonging to various thematic orders, which, by a meticulous analysis, present their main function

and which become the indicators of textual integrity, motives for uniting its senses" (DOBZYŃSKA, forthcoming).

Manifestation of the rules for creating a complete verbal structure, or indicating not only the fact of uttering a text but also **how** it is uttered, is subject to exposure of textual relations, subject to introducing a concrete text into a sequence of other texts (e.g. allusions, quotations, pastiche), that become the ingredient of a particular linguistic product (CZAPLIŃSKI, 1997). Here, one must agree with the necessity to expand the scope of the analysed notion; this expansion must occur under the dynamic and expansively developed theory of intertextuality. It is not going to be easy to prepare an unambiguous answer to the question how to mark a boundary between intertextual references and the *meta* level – exposing the processes of quoting, compiling, creating synopses, transforming other text is just exhibiting the structural rules and tricks at disposal of a graphemic text – which is i.a. one of the functions of a metastatement. It is one of the objectives of stylistics, which analyses primarily literary texts manifesting mainly the fact that they are “made of literature” (CZAPLIŃSKI, 1997: 152) and make references to the latter, not to the reality. Opinions of neighbouring disciplines on semiotisation of the real world, which has happened due to semiotisation of culture, esthetisation of the surrounding reality; acceptance of the poststructural thesis that the world is a text and the approval of a popular hypothesis that it is impossible to write in an original manner – all of it delimits – as I maintain – a possibility of a different way thinking about intertextuality. It seems less essential to “read between the lines” and to treat intertextual relations as signals directed at the outside of the statement, or towards other texts. Much more important is their role directed at the inside, focusing attention on the same text, for if – according to the language of a theoretical description – everything has an intertextual dimension, seeking relations between texts seems impossible and fairly unjustified. Notwithstanding we should rather treat intertexts as a manifestation of literary culture, convention, referential character of a given texts. In short words – intertextualia become (at least in part) a medium of metatextual contents.

The tendency to extend the scope of the category of metatext is recently presented in various works of pragmalinguistics. Another term for the phenomenon – “metadiscourse” – indicates not only the organization of the space of a given statement, but also **the organization of the act of uttering**. Thus, metadiscourse encompasses the fields of communication pragmatics and of the theory of speech acts (DUSZAK, 1998: 136). The metatextual interpretation proposed by pragmalinguistics moves a great part of characteristics of a pragmatic statement towards the *meta* layer, in particular the vast question of interpersonal relations.

Each discipline and each methodology creates and limits their subject of interest in their own peculiar way, each makes their own decisions among available possibilities outlined by the boundaries a given theory. The tendency to extend (and, for this reason, to blur) the scope of the notion of metatext is similar to the transformations observable in terms of the definition of the notion of “text”, and it results from the consistent pursue for the extension of linguistic textology areas. Today, it seems that it is an unavoidable process, the future will show whether it may deepen our actual knowledge of differentiated relations in the space of discourse/text. Any attempt to reformulate the previous results in this scope requires simultaneous verification of the whole network of notions related to the category of discourse, and that is a problem of extremely complex theoretical choices.

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