Creativity in response: performance and critique around canonical and popular texts

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Sociolinguistic studies have often focused on the dynamics of creative language production, but in this presentation we argue that greater attention should be paid to moments of creative reception (cf Carter 2007). To illustrate this, we report on two sociolinguistic studies of readers’/viewers’ interaction with texts:

- children’s responses, in friendship groups, to popular media texts
- adults’ responses, in reading groups, to more high-status/canonical texts.

We examine how participants’ adoption of particular interpretive styles involves the interweaving of emotional engagement, imaginative identification, moral judgement and aesthetic appreciation. Focussing in particular on mimetic responses, which ‘involve an audience’s interest in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as like our own’ (Phelan 2005: 20), we show how these responses constitute creative revoicings and re-performance of texts.

We draw on Bakhtinian conceptions of addressivity and dialogicality (Bakhtin, [1935] 1981) and anthropological conceptions of performance and critique (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). Our data shows readers’ and viewers’ responses to be socially-mediated, contingent, emerging dialogically across time and embedded in relational activity. We suggest that these dynamic responses to texts trouble conceptual binaries such as speaker/listener, performer/audience, reader/writer and production/reception, which are still persistent in sociolinguistic theory and practice.

References


Keywords: troubled binaries, creative response, dialogicality.