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# Introduction

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# Introduction

**Ina Biermann and Hilton Hubbard**

"Stylistics is ... concerned with relating linguistic facts (linguistic description) to meaning (interpretation) in as *explicit* a way as possible" (Short 1996: 5). This special issue on stylistics seeks to demonstrate and, even more than that, to celebrate, the value and usefulness of stylistic analysis of literary texts. The articles in this issue manifestly weaken the continual "So what?" argument against stylistic analysis by revealing that the more detailed and more linguistically sound the description of the language of the text, the more access there can be to meaning and the more justified is the interpretation of the text. The guest editors take the position that the meticulous, time-consuming analysis and the precise description of any aspect of the language of texts are integral to the process of understanding itself, or, to put it boldly, that the opposition between description and interpretation is essentially a false opposition.

In the contributions included in this issue, the emphasis is on literary texts, but the analytical principles used and developed can have application in other spheres of language use. The contributions relate to all three literary genres and to texts in English, Afrikaans and Dutch. The articles are strongly text-based, but implications for theories of narrative, viewpoint and the reader are pointed out. This issue also includes empirical work and contributions to pedagogical stylistics.

Peter Verdonk's article, "The Liberation of the Icon: A Brief Survey From Classical Rhetoric to Cognitive Stylistics", provides a general historical perspective on the development of stylistics as a discipline and on current emphases within this field. This contribution can serve as a valuable source of reference for teaching and research purposes.

Most of the articles are directly or indirectly involved with the purposes of stylistic analysis. Mick Short's article, "Graphological Deviation, Style Variation and Point of View in *Marabou Stork Nightmares* by Irvine Welsh", investigates in a narrative text the role of a type of deviation mostly associated with poetic texts. Graphological deviation in this text is shown to be communicative of style variation that indicates changes in viewpoint in the novel. The stylistic value of narratological concepts such as focaliser and reflector are questioned. With respect to this, the essays by Short and Biermann may be viewed as being in dialogue.

The communicative value of specific linguistic features is made explicit in Ina

Biermann's article, "Sound Repetition as Characterisation Mechanism in *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie". By analysing the sound repetitions in an extract from the novel, she argues that the metaphorisation of sighing is achieved and communicated by means of the functional use of linguistic sound. She indicates the interpretative function as well as the narratological implications of an order of microlinguistic organisation that is usually expected to occur in poetic texts. With Hilton Hubbard's "Love, War and Lexicogrammar: Transitivity and Characterisation in *The Moor's Last Sigh*", the focus remains on the Rushdie text and also on characterisation, but here it is the transitivity system of systemic-functional grammar that is applied in considering why some fictional characters come across as more dynamic than others.

In another essentially quantitative study, "Something Will Come of Nothing: An Empirical Model of Negation in Prose Literature", Greg Watson shows that analysing negative language in a novelist's oeuvre can reveal a variety of stylistic patterns and shifts over time. Different effects of negative language are also considered and it is argued that the higher the density of negative language in a narrative text, the greater the cognitive challenge to the reader and that, other things being equal, the greater that challenge, the more the reader becomes involved in the text. Whereas Watson deals with the oppositions implicit in negation, Paolo Trimarco investigates explicit lexical opposites in "An Analysis of Lexical Opposition: Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*". Trimarco applies a fine-grained lexical-semantic taxonomy in describing the contrasting worlds created in Le Guin's short story, pointing up the value of such a linguistic approach in facilitating a more precise and insightful account of the relevant stylistic effects.

With Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio's "*The Playboy of the Western World*: The Subversion of a Traditional Conception of Irishness?" the focus shifts from semantics to pragmatics. Tenorio applies speech act, Gricean and politeness frameworks to reveal a variety of ways in which Synge's female characters violated the strong gender-based norms prevalent in Ireland at the turn of the century and as a result gave rise to more than just literary effects: her analysis goes a long way towards explaining the much publicised "riotous" behaviour of large sections of the audience during runs of this play at the Abbey Theatre.

The two contributions dealing with Afrikaans texts are those by Piet du Toit and Rensia Robinson. Du Toit investigates point of view as a narratologically communicative principle. In *Vir Vier Stemme* by Hennie Aucamp, the stance of the narrator is shown to be reflected by the language of the text. The genre of poetic texts receives attention from Robinson, who discusses stylistic manifestations and interpretative consequences of the intertextual relationship between the poetry of the Afrikaans poet T.T. Cloete and the Dutch poet J.H. Leopold in

Cloete's oeuvre.

The contributions by Paul Simpson and Sonia Zyngier specifically demonstrate the use of stylistics in teaching. By analysing thought and speech presentation in *The Old Man and the Sea* by Hemingway, Simpson raises the issue of how critical comments about literary texts may be evaluated and verified by stylistic analysis. His diagnosis of the problem with many critical evaluations of literary texts is that they result from "pseudo-linguistic evidence [which] is often offered as justification for the affective readings that are mapped on the text" (pp. 517). Simpson describes a stylistics teaching programme aimed at investigating how stylistic texture may be related to literary meaning, or "the retrievability of connections between the assumed style of the text and the literary interpretations drawn from the text" (pp. 517). This article is a contribution to the current state of research about the value of stylistics for the teaching of English language, for the study of narrative fiction and for the critical evaluation and interpretation of literary texts. In "Stylistics in the EFLit Classroom: Using Free Indirect Discourse", Zyngier addresses very similar concerns to those of Simpson. She concentrates on one mode of speech and thought representation, namely Free Indirect Discourse, arguing that this mode is particularly relevant to the needs of students studying English in a foreign language context.

We hope that the eleven articles in this issue will stimulate interest in the description and understanding of the language used in literary texts. We would like to encourage critical notes or contributions in subsequent issues of the journal to follow up on the ideas that emerge from this special issue on stylistics.

## Reference

Short, Mick

1996 *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose.* London & New York: Longman.