Pedagogical Stylistics and Literary Evaluation

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Summary

This article is about pedagogical stylistics in general and about the critical evaluation of fictional narrative in particular. It examines levels of narrative organisation in a passage from Ernest Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea* ([1952]1976) and makes specific reference to patterns of speech and thought presentation in the extract. A basic teaching programme is outlined which is designed to encourage students' awareness of the way modes of speech and thought presentation function in narrative. The programme is also designed to enable students to place their stylistic analyses of the text against literary-critical commentaries on the same text, thereby problematising the connections between stylistic analysis and literary evaluation.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel gaan oor pedagogiese stilistiek in die algemeen en oor die kritiese evaluasie van fiksionele narratiewe tekste in die besonder. Dit ondersoek vlakke van narratiewe organisasie in 'n gedeelte uit Ernest Hemingway se novelle *The Old Man and the Sea* ([1952]1976) en verwys spesifiek na patrone in die aanbieding van spraak en van gedagtegang in die uittreksel. 'n Basiese onderrigprogram word uiteengesit wat ontwerp is om studente aan te moedig om raak te sien hoe maniere van spraak- en gedagteaanbieding in narratiewe tekste funksioneer. Die program is ook ontwerp om studente in staat te stel om hulle stilistiese analises van die teks te vergelyk met literêr-kritiese kommentare van dieselfde teks, waardeur die verbintenisse tussen stilistiese analise en literêre evaluasie geproblematiseer word.

Keywords: Hemingway, Ernest; language teaching; literary evaluation; narrative pedagogical stylistics; speech presentation; *The Old Man and the Sea*; thought presentation.

1 Introduction

This paper examines a number of interrelated issues to do with stylistics, language teaching and literary evaluation. The centrality of pedagogy in modern stylistics has been reiterated in many publications in recent years (Short 1989; 1996; Toolan 1998), and there has been much emphasis on the potential that the practice of stylistics has for learning about language and discourse (Carter & Nash 1990; Widdowson 1992). One of the consequences of this is that there is now a body of work which explicitly ties in stylistic analysis with the teaching of English language to both native and non-native speakers (McRae 1998; Simpson 1997a). The present study seeks to develop this area further by addressing two principal aims. These are:

(i) To assess the contribution stylistics can make to the study of language at the macro-level and to the study of fictional narrative at the micro-level
(ii) To assess the value of stylistics to the critical evaluation and interpretation of literary texts

With regard to the first aim, the main area of analysis will be that feature of narrative structure referred to as speech and thought presentation; with regard to the second, the text which forms the focus for literary analysis will be Ernest Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea*.

In order to address these two interconnected aims, the paper will be structured in the following way. The next section will offer a brief outline of the principal categories of speech and thought presentation. This overview will be kept as simple as possible, although suggestions will be made about where to look for more sophisticated treatments of the subject. In the third section, after some context has been provided for the literary material used, a basic teaching programme will be outlined which is aimed at developing an awareness of the way speech and thought presentation is used in literary narrative. This programme is designed to encourage students to use their stylistic analyses in tandem with their affective responses to literary narrative and to enable them to challenge and (re)evaluate some of the literary critical commentaries that have been written on the texts they are studying. In the final section, the implications of the present study are considered and the feasibility of constructing future studies along the same lines is assessed.

2 The Speech and Thought Model

The most influential framework for the analysis of speech and thought representation in narrative fiction is undoubtedly that of Mick Short and his co-researchers. Leech and Short (1981) is one of the first systematic accounts of this narrative technique to be located within stylistic theory and practice. More recently, Short (1996) offers a revised version of the model which, again, has practical stylistic application as one of its central tenets. More scholarly in general orientation are a batch of recent publications (Short, Semino & Culpeper 1996; Short, Semino & Wynn 1999; Short, Semino & Wynn forthcoming [2001], Semino, Short & Wynn 1999). These are theoretically more sophisticated studies which expand the scope of inquiry to cover the presentation of speech and thought in discourse genres beyond those conventionally classed as literary. The chief concern here is to develop a set of analytic criteria that can be accessed and implemented relatively comfortably by the student of language and stylistics. To that extent, the brief summary of the model provided in this section has of necessity been kept as simple as possible. Reference will be made primarily to the more introductory treatments of the subject in Leech and Short (1981) and Short (1996), although other relevant material will be flagged up where necessary.

Beginning with the categories of speech presentation, the "baseline" form against which other forms are often measured is Direct Speech (DS). The following two examples illustrate how the reporting clause in this mode may be either preposed or postposed relative to the quoted material:

> "I'll be here tomorrow", she said.
> She said, "I'll be here tomorrow."

Direct Speech stands in contrast to (though is systematically related to) an altogether more remote form of reporting known as Indirect Speech (IS):

> She said that she would be there the following day.

The method for converting Direct forms into Indirect ones involves a series of parallel grammatical operations, summarised as follows:

> Stage 1: Make quotation grammatically remote from anterior speech.
> Stage 2: Shift pronouns: 1st and 2nd person pronouns into 3rd person.
> Stage 3: Switch deictics (both spatial and temporal) from proximal to distal.
> Stage 4: Change direction of movement verbs.
> Stage 5: Backshift tense markers: e.g. primary tense "know" into backshifted

tense "knew"; "will" into "would"; "does" into "did"; "must" into "had to"; "is" into "was"; "was" into "had been" and so on.

A further operation may be carried out on both the Direct and the Indirect forms to render them in their "free" variants. This involves removing the reporting clause and removing, if present, any inverted commas. If this operation is only partially followed through, then various intermediate forms present themselves. Here are the "free" versions, along with subvarieties, of both the DS and IS forms introduced above:

Free Direct Speech (FDS):
I'll be here tomorrow, she said.
"I'll be here tomorrow."
I'll be here tomorrow. [= maximal freedom]

Free Indirect Speech (FIS):
She would be there the following day.
She would be there tomorrow.

The categories available for presenting *thought* in narrative fiction are formally similar to those for speech:

Does she still love me? (Free Direct Thought: FDT)
He wondered, "Does she still love me?" (Direct Thought: DT)
Did she still love him? (Free Indirect Thought: FIT)
He wondered if she still loved him. (Indirect Thought: IT)

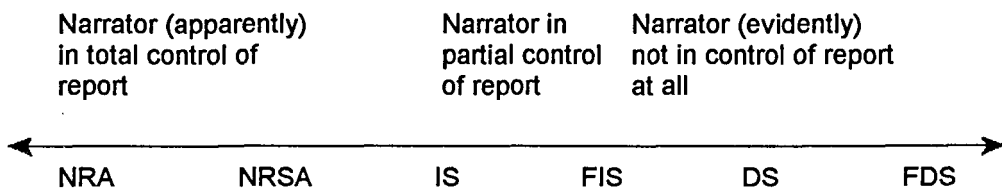
It is important to note that in spite of their formal similarities, there are significant conceptual differences between the speech and thought modes. Whereas speech could be "overhead" and reported by any bystander to an interaction, the presentation of thought is putative insofar as it presumes entry into the private consciousness of a character (cf. Short 1996: 290).

A few final points will close this admittedly brief survey of the speech and thought model. In the version set out here, a qualitative distinction is made between DS and DT and their freer variants, FDS and FDT. The theoretical validity of such a distinction has been questioned, and in Short (1996) it has been collapsed in favour of two broader categories of DS and DT. In view of the literary data used later in the present study, I want to retain the distinction in order to capture some of the subtleties in shifts between modes.

Whatever the particular category used, all of the techniques of speech and thought presentation represent a shift away from basic narrative structure towards the discourse of a particular character. The external narrative frame-

work into which modes of speech and thought are woven is referred to as Narrator's Representation of Action (NRA). It describes the actions, perceptions and states that occur in the world of the fiction; it basically encompasses all nonspeech and nonthought phenomena (Short 1996: 292). NRA stands at one end of a continuum of narratorial control at the opposite pole of which stand the Free Direct modes:

Cline of Narratorial Control in Presentation of Speech



(Leech & Short 1981: 324)

As one progresses from left to right along the continuum, the degree of narratorial control over what was thought or said diminishes, until the character is permitted to express thoughts or speech with seemingly unmediated immediacy.

Much more could be said (and indeed has been said) on the stylistic vibrancy and colour that is lent to narrative fiction by the modes of speech and thought presentation. Special attention has been given over the years to the Free Indirect modes (Pascal 1977; Fludernik 1993) while work on stream of consciousness using the speech and thought model can be found in Short (1996: 316-320) and Simpson (1993: 26-29). There has also been some debate about the way the categories interconnect, with alternatives offered to the continuum model discussed above (Simpson 1997b; Short et al. 1997). Applications of the speech and thought model to nonliterary discourses can be found in Short (1988) and, with particular reference to South African media, McKenzie (1987). Clearly, the brief overview of the model offered in this section is only a glimpse of the vast body of work that exists within this tradition of stylistics.

3 The Teaching Programme

3.1 The Text

Before moving into the analytic and pedagogic areas of this paper it is worth introducing here the passage from Hemingway's story that will form the nucleus

of the stylistic programme that follows. The intention will ultimately be to place this passage against a series of literary-critical comments about the novella and then to use stylistic analysis as a way of reappraising the critical comments and of reaching more systematic interpretations about Hemingway's narrative technique.

The passage is taken from the lengthy central section of the story which covers the time the old man spends at sea during his struggle with the huge marlin that he has hooked. This particular episode occurs early in the morning of the second day of his battle with the fish (thus explaining the references in the text below to "the line" slanting into the water). He is confronted with two practical problems: eating the small tuna that he caught the day before and solving the problem of his cramped left hand. The passage is quite neatly rounded in that it stretches from the preparatory stages to the completion of the old man's meal. To facilitate subsequent referencing to the passage, lines have been numbered and paragraph boundaries have been double-spaced.

He knelt down and found the tuna under the stern with the gaff and drew it toward him keeping it clear of the coiled lines. Holding the line with his left shoulder again, and bracing on his left hand and arm, he took the tuna off the gaff hook and put the gaff back in place. He put one knee on the fish and cut strips of dark red meat longitudinally from the back of the head to the tail. They were wedge-shaped strips and he cut them from next to the back bone down to the edge of the belly. When he had cut six strips he spread them out on the wood of the bow, wiped his knife on his trousers, and lifted the carcass of the bonito by the tail and dropped it overboard.

"I don't think I can eat an entire one", he said and drew his knife across one of the strips. He could feel the steady hard pull of the line and his left hand was cramped. It drew up tight on the heavy cord and he looked at it in disgust.

"What kind of a hand is that", he said. "Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good."

Come on, he thought and looked down into the dark water at the slant of the line. Eat it now and it will strengthen the hand. It is not the hand's fault and you have been many hours with the fish. But you can stay with him for ever. Eat the bonito now.

He picked up a piece and put it in his mouth and chewed it slowly. It was not unpleasant.

Chew it well, he thought, and get all the juices. It would not be bad to eat with a little lime or with lemon or with salt.

"How do you feel, hand?" he asked the cramped hand that was almost as still as rigor mortis. "I'll eat some more for you."

He ate the other part of the piece that he had cut in two. He chewed it carefully and then spat out the skin.

"How does it go, hand? Or is it too early to know?"

He took another full piece and chewed it.

"It is a strong full-blooded fish," he thought. "I was lucky to get him instead of dolphin. Dolphin is too sweet. This is hardly sweet at all and all the strength is still in it."

There is no sense in being anything but practical though, he thought. I wish I had some salt. And I do not know whether the sun will rot or dry what is left, so I had better eat it all although I am not hungry. The fish is calm and steady. I will eat it all and then I will be ready.

"Be patient, hand," he said. "I do this for you."

I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it. Slowly and conscientiously he ate all of the wedge-shaped strips of fish.

He straightened up, wiping his hand on his trousers.

Hemingway [1952]1976: 47-49

3.2 The Critical Context

There has been a vast amount of literary criticism devoted to Hemingway's writing and within this body of work, the coverage received by *The Old Man and the Sea* has been substantial. As we shall see shortly, much of this criticism makes reference to the perceived "simplicity" of Hemingway's prose style, and, frankly, much of it is ad hoc and lacking in any sort of linguistic rigour. With the odd comment on localised parts of speech and some passing remarks on sentence structure, there is seldom any reference to different and multiple levels of linguistic and narrative organisation. It is of course unfair to take critics to task for not doing things they never set out to do in the first place - even when

the titles of several of their studies confidently promise "linguistic" commentaries on Hemingway's prose style (cf. below). However, it is important to note the interpretative consequences of these impressionistic responses to style: pseudo-linguistic evidence is often offered as justification for the affective readings that are mapped on the text. These readings, which are ostensibly triggered by the "pureness" and "profundity" of Hemingway's stylistic technique, tend to emphasise the biblical, allegorical and mythical elements in the story. Part of the aim of this programme in pedagogical stylistics is to investigate the retrievability of connections between the assumed style of the text and the literary interpretations drawn from the text. Accessing these connections poses problems for beginning students of language and literature, especially for those outside the culture that produced the text and its critical readings.

3.3 The Workshop Design

In the discussion that follows, some reference will be made (on a qualitative basis only) to the responses of a group of students who undertook this workshop in 1999 at my own institution, the Queen's University of Belfast. The thirty-strong group was a mixture of Level 2 and 3 students of whom twenty-one were female. Eight of the group were non-native speakers of English. All of the students had completed at least one year of full-time undergraduate study as part of a degree programme in English language and literature. The full set of workshop instructions given to the group is reproduced in the Appendix at the end of this paper.

The first task involves asking the students to read the passage closely; the second to get them to explore the usefulness of some critical readings on the text. Five literary-critical statements, all of which to some degree are prone to the interpretive weaknesses highlighted above, were collected from the literature on *The Old Man and the Sea.* Each statement was given a letter and arranged thus[1]:

A. As a matter of fact, Hemingway takes pains to avoid the *mot juste*, probably because it sounds too "literary" to him, preferring the general, unspecific word like "and" ....

B. ... there is a really heroic piece of narrative in *The Old Man and the Sea*, told with a simplicity which shows that Mr. Hemingway has forgotten that he is a tough writer ... the first few pages are almost strangely sentimental with relapses into the "ands" of children's storybooks.

C. The reader who expects a psychological novel will feel disappointed, despite

the superb handling of the material and the style which is classical in its simplicity and force, pure as poetry, sonorous as music, flowing on the rhythms of the sea it describes.

D. The plain, dry, restrained and documentary style succeeds in lending an extraordinary glow and depth to its simple subject matter.

E. Granted, then, that Hemingway's diction is thin; that in the technical sense, his syntax is weak; and that he would be rather be caught dead than seeking the *mot juste* or the balanced phrase. Granted that his adjectives are not colourful and his verbs not particularly energetic.

On the basis of their earlier reading of the passage, the students were asked to rank these statements in order of accuracy and appropriateness. They were also asked to say why they considered a particular remark to be more or less effective than another. It has to be said that the group of students whose comments are reported here found very little of value in any of the critical statements. Statement A was felt to be "not particularly informative", though it was "reasonable enough" as far as it went. Statement B was "too personalised about the writer" but otherwise seemed "OK". Statement C fared very badly, and the comment about style "flowing on the rhythms of the sea" was singled out for particular criticism ("naff"; "too airy-fairy"; "completely daft"). Statement D was responded to more positively although students found it hard to see how a "documentary style" could make subject matter "glow". Opinion was divided on statement E, largely because students felt that it was "too out of context" to know what the critic was getting at, although "what he [sic] did say might be interesting". Although the future design of the workshop clearly warrants replacement of statement E, there was still some measure of agreement across the group of students about the usefulness or otherwise of the five statements. The overall ranking, beginning with the most favoured statement, runs as follows: D, A, E, B, C.

3.4 The Analysis of Speech and Thought Presentation

The next stage of the teaching programme involves an analysis of speech and thought presentation in the passage using the criteria outlined in Section 2. This is designed to provide not only greater analytic purchase on the text itself but also to offer a stylistic counterbalance to the set of intuitive critical statements listed above.

Three principal narrative strands run through the passage. These strands, which often dovetail neatly with paragraph organisation, comprise speech presentation, thought presentation and Narrator's Representation of Action. The last of these, NRA, is clearly marked by strings of narrative clauses which are temporally ordered, contain verbs in the simple past and which express (predominantly) action processes. Thus:

> He knelt down and found the tuna under the stern with the gaff and drew it toward him ....
>
> (lines 1-2)

NRA realises both the opening and final paragraphs, and is also distributed evenly throughout the remainder of the passage at lines 11-14, 21-22, 27-28, 30 and 40-41.[2] Interwoven through this central narrative framework are clusters of speech and thought presentation. Speech, in which the old man is normally talking aloud to his cramped hand, is represented in the Direct mode, as in:

> "What kind of a hand is that", he said. "Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good."
>
> (lines 15-16)

However, the Free Direct mode, where the reporting clause has been stripped away, occurs once.

> "How does it go hand? Or is it too early to know?"
>
> (line 29)

The third strand, realised by thought presentation, verbalises the consciousness of the old man which for the most part centres on his self-reflexive exhortation to eat the frugal meal. With only two exceptions, this is articulated through a variant of the Free Direct mode in which reporting clauses have been retained but inverted commas removed:

> Come on, he thought ....
>
> (line 17)

> There is no sense in being anything but practical though, he thought ....
>
> (lines 34-35)

In partial contrast to this FDT pattern stands a clearly marked example of Direct Thought:

"It is strong full-blooded fish," he thought. "I was lucky to get him ...."
(line 31)

While DT is often thought of as a contrived and somewhat artless mode of thought presentation (and is for this reason relatively rare in prose fiction), the self-conscious feel that the technique engenders is arguably well-suited in the present context to the old man's deliberations.

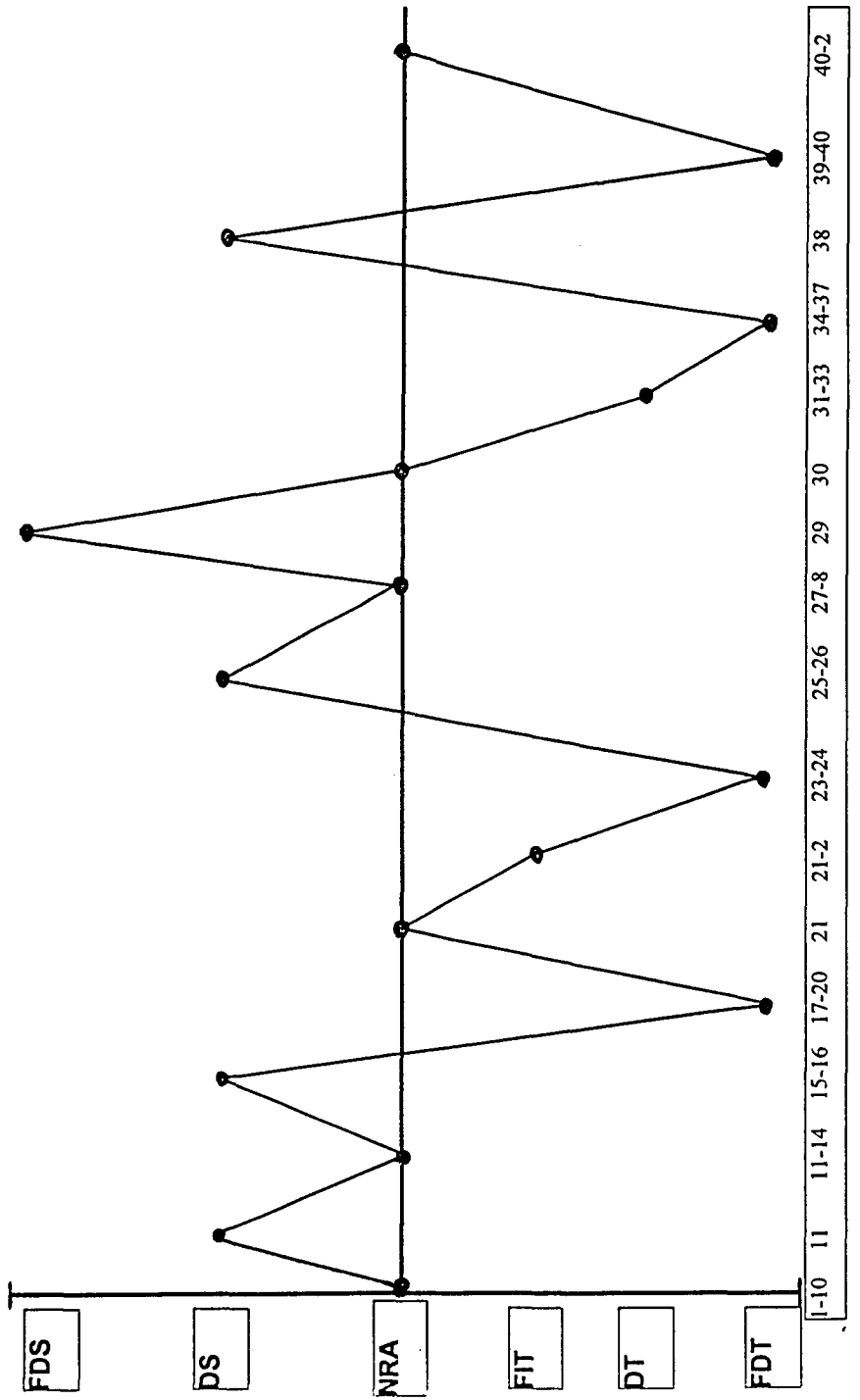
The second exception to the FDT pattern is a possible case of Free Indirect Thought:

It was not unpleasant.
(lines 20-21)

The fact that this example could be assigned either to the NRA strand which frames it or to the active thought processes of the character stands as testimony to the elusiveness and "double-voiced" nature of this narrative device. This sequence, with its euphemistic double negative suggesting idiolectal language, relates specifically to the old man's meal, and on these grounds I shall treat it here as a backshifted (and therefore Free Indirect) variant of a possible FDT structure like:

It is not unpleasant, he thought.

It is a notable feature of this passage (and for that matter the bulk of the central section of the novella) that its narrative structure is developed through a sustained pattern of oscillation between the three strands identified above. With NRA as a locus, the narrative develops cyclically through transitions into speech, which is often, though not always, in the DS mode, and then through transitions into thought, which is often, though not always, in the FDT mode. This pattern is then rounded off by a return to NRA. In the passage, there are no less than sixteen such transitions in only forty-four sentences. These transitions have been captured diagrammatically on Figure 1 below. On the figure, the horizontal axis represents the forward plot development of the passage, moving from line 1 through to line 42. The vertical axis marks the transition from one strand to another and each of the modes of speech and thought presentation realised in the passage is assigned a position on the vertical axis. Speech modes are plotted above the NRA line on the vertical axis; thought modes below. Each of the transitions in the passage is represented by a through-line connecting each node on the axis.


FDS
DS
NRA
FIT
DT
FDT
1-10
11
11-14
15-16
17-20
21
21-2
23-24
25-26
27-8
29
30
31-33
34-37
38
39-40
40-2

In terms of the practicalities of the workshop programme, this figure can be drawn up (on, say, whiteboard, blackboard or overhead transparency) after the various speech and thought categories have been identified. Whatever the precise layout of the categories on the vertical axis, the result will always be an oscillating line weaving through the speech, thought and NRA nodes. The greater the distance between the left- and right-hand margins, then the greater the space for the horizontal axis, which in turn will make the transitions between various modes look clearer and smoother. The broad stylistic implications of this figure and its particular value to the workshop programme will be two of the issues developed in the next section.

4 Stylistic Analysis and Critical (Re-)evaluation

The visual representation of the narrative texture of the passage can be used to reassess the set of critical statements introduced earlier in the programme. As was noted, the bulk of this critical commentary stressed the supposed "simplicity" of the story's style, yet the layout provided by Figure 1 suggests a degree of subtlety in narrative organisation that had not hitherto been identified by the critics. It suggests also that the critics are tending to look in the wrong place for significant stylistic features. That is to say, parts of speech such as nouns, verbs and adjectives are not necessarily the principal indices of narrative style; nor is the connective "and" about which, frankly, some preposterous comments are made in the critical statements. This is not to deny the importance of lexico-grammatical patterns in narrative structure. However, if these features are felt to be salient then they should be dealt with rigorously and systematically. It needs also to be recognised that narratives as a whole comprise layers and levels of organisation that cannot be fully accommodated within straightforward lexico-grammatical analysis.

It is worth considering how the analysis of speech and thought modes and the subsequent development of Figure 1 impacts on the rank ordering of the five critical statements. The group of students who produced the initial ranking offered some illuminating feedback on the basis of their analysis of speech and thought. For the most part, the analysis served to consolidate the impression that the critical statements offered little in the way of concrete information about Hemingway's use of language in the passage. Having said that, there was one particular statement that caught the attention of the group when it was set against the figure. This was statement C, which had been resolutely and unequivocally consigned to the bottom of the original ranking list. To be candid, it was with statement C in mind that the original idea for the diagrammatic

representation of the passage presented itself.

The points of intersection between the layout of the figure and critic C's remarks are interesting. The critic suggests that narrative technique is foregrounded at the expense of psychological interpretation, and to the extent that the style of the novella echoes the very physicality of what it sets out to depict. This culminates in the reference to the style "flowing on the rhythms of the sea it describes". Although scoffed at initially, this remark, when placed in the context of the figure, no longer reads like the literary-critical excess it first seemed. Indeed, it prompts a hypothesis that is both tendentious and fanciful but is nonetheless worth mooting as a point for debate. The figure essentially captures a dual movement in the passage: the linear progression of the text as narrative on one level, and the movement created by oscillations between speech and thought modes on another. There is a curious analogy between this dual movement at the level of narrative structure and the implied movements of the old man and his boat. On the one hand, the boat moves on the sea horizontally - the effect of being dragged by the huge marlin; on the other, it moves up and down vertically as a consequence of the swell of the Gulf Stream. Both types of movement are commented upon extensively in the novella's central section. Moreover, the particular wave-like pattern of speech and thought presentation identified in our analysis is only initiated once the old man sets sail in his boat. Thereafter, it is sustained with almost mathematical consistency during his time at sea. Is it the case, then, that the "narrative waves" created as stylistic texture are an analogue of the fictional environment portrayed in the story?

It is, of course, impossible to answer this question with any degree of certainty. Stylistic categories and affective responses are simply not homologous spheres of reference, and the interpretative pathway that connects them is abstract, indirect and multidimensional. That granted, the students who responded to the "narrative wave" hypothesis during the workshop were noticeably divided in their opinion. Some simply were not convinced by the suggested connection between the stylistic analysis and the physical elements of the fictional world. However, they were hard put to explain why they found the theory unconvincing. Around two thirds of the group, by contrast, found the theory appealing. There was a general sense that the rhythmical texture displayed by the narrative analysis echoed the very movements of the old man on the sea and, as a consequence, these students wanted to elevate comment C to the top of their ranking. They felt that the critic had had an "insight" into the style of the story, though they added the proviso that no retrievable evidence was offered in support of this insight.

The issue at the heart of this exercise in pedagogical stylistics concerns the connections between stylistic analysis and literary evaluation. It is not about the

validity of the "narrative wave" hypothesis or about which students are right or wrong in their responses to the hypothesis. In all probability, the hypothesis as it stands cannot be tested in any empirically verifiable way. What can be mooted for discussion, however, is the manner by which a stylistic analysis can impact on the critical evaluation of a text. This in turn helps problematise the issues that arise from the ways we link analysis and interpretation. The present study raises these issues by examining one feature of narrative organisation in one short excerpt of prose fiction. To that extent, it is limited in terms of its aims and scope. Looking to the future, it is hoped that the design of this programme can be enhanced to incorporate other forms of stylistic analysis and to balance these analyses with affective responses to other types of literary discourse.

Notes

1. Here are full sources for each of the literary-critical comments compiled for the workshop. Page numbers locating each comment are provided in brackets at the end of the reference.

   A. = Peterson, R. K. (1974) *Hemingway Direct and Oblique*. The Hague: Mouton. (pp. 23-24)

   B. = Muir, E. (1952) Review of *The Old Man and the Sea*. In: *The Observer* (7th September). Reprinted in Meyers, J. (ed.) (1982) *Hemingway: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge. (p. 408)

   C. = J. v.d. S. (1953) Amerikaanse Letteren. In: *Tafelronde* 1, pp. 60-62. (p. 62)

   D. = Bakker, J. (ed). (1986) *Ernest Hemingway in Holland, 1925-1981: A Comparative Analysis of the Contemporary Dutch and American Critical Reception to his Work*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. (p. 86)

   E. = Levin, H. (1972) Observations on the Style of Ernest Hemingway. In: Babb, H. (ed.) *Essays in Stylistic Analysis*. London: Harcourt Brace. (p. 331)

2. A case could be made for classifying the short sequence "and looked down into the dark water at the slant of the line" (at lines 17-18) as NRA. This sequence is coordinated with a reporting clause of thought presentation, although it signals the beginnings of a move towards NRA.

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APPENDIX

A Workshop on Narrative Stylistics and Literary Evaluation

Part 1

The passage used in this workshop is taken from the middle section of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. It details the second day of the old man's struggle with a huge fish which he has hooked (hence the references to "the line" slanting into the water). Read the passage now.

Part 2

Examine the following five critical statements on *The Old Man and the Sea*. Rank them in order of accuracy / appropriateness. Try to say why you consider a particular remark to be more or less effective than another.

A. As a matter of fact, Hemingway takes pains to avoid the *mot juste*, probably because it sounds too "literary" to him, preferring the general, unspecific word like "and" ....

B. ... there is a really heroic piece of narrative in *The Old Man and the Sea*, told with a simplicity which shows that Mr. Hemingway has forgotten that he is a tough writer ... the first few pages are almost strangely sentimental with relapses into the "ands" of children's storybooks.

C. The reader who expects a psychological novel will feel disappointed, despite the superb handling of the material and the style which is classical in its simplicity and force, pure as poetry, sonorous as music, flowing on the rhythms of the sea it describes.

D. The plain, dry, restrained and documentary style succeeds in lending an extraordinary glow and depth to its simple subject matter.

E. Granted, then, that Hemingway's diction is thin; that in the technical sense, his syntax is weak; and that he would rather be caught dead than seeking the *mot juste* or the balanced phrase. Granted that his adjectives are not colourful and his verbs not particularly energetic.

Part 3

Now do a stylistic analysis of the passage from *The Old Man and the Sea* paying attention to the various modes of *speech and thought presentation* used in the passage.

Part 4

Re-evaluate the literary-critical comments in Part 2 against your analysis of the text. Are any of the comments a true reflection of Hemingway's prose style? Have you been tempted to modify your initial rankings in any way?