

# **SECTION A**

## **INTRODUCTION**

KEY CONCEPTS IN  
STYLISTICS

## A1

**WHAT IS STYLISTICS?**

Some years ago, the well-known linguist Jean-Jacques Lecercle published a short but damning critique of the aims, methods and rationale of contemporary stylistics. His attack on the discipline, and by implication the entire endeavour of the present book, was uncompromising. According to Lecercle, nobody has ever really known what the term 'stylistics' means, and in any case, hardly anyone seems to care (Lecercle 1993: 14). Stylistics is 'ailing'; it is 'on the wane'; and its heyday, alongside that of structuralism, has faded to but a distant memory. More alarming again, few university students are 'eager to declare an intention to do research in stylistics'. By this account, the death knell of stylistics had been sounded and it looked as though the end of the twentieth century would be accompanied by the inevitable passing of that faltering, moribund discipline. And no one, it seemed, would lament its demise.

**Modern stylistics**

As it happened, things didn't quite turn out in the way Lecercle envisaged. Stylistics in the early twenty-first century is very much alive and well. It is taught and researched in university departments of language, literature and linguistics the world over. The high academic profile stylistics enjoys is mirrored in the number of its dedicated book-length publications, research journals, international conferences and symposia, and scholarly associations. Far from moribund, modern stylistics is positively flourishing, witnessed in a proliferation of sub-disciplines where stylistic methods are enriched and enabled by theories of discourse, culture and society. For example, feminist stylistics, cognitive stylistics and discourse stylistics, to name just three, are established branches of contemporary stylistics which have been sustained by insights from, respectively, feminist theory, cognitive psychology and discourse analysis. Stylistics has also become a much valued method in language teaching and in language learning, and stylistics in this 'pedagogical' guise, with its close attention to the broad resources of the system of language, enjoys particular pride of place in the linguistic armoury of learners of second languages. Moreover, stylistics often forms a core component of many creative writing courses, an application not surprising given the discipline's emphasis on techniques of creativity and invention in language.

So much then for the current 'health' of stylistics and the prominence it enjoys in modern scholarship. It is now time to say a little more about what exactly stylistics is and what it is for. Stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to *language*. The reason why language is so important to stylisticians is because the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure are an important index of the function of the text. The text's functional significance as discourse acts in turn as a gateway to its interpretation. While linguistic features do not of themselves constitute a text's 'meaning', an account of linguistic features nonetheless serves to ground a stylistic interpretation and to help explain why, for the analyst, certain types of meaning are possible. The preferred object of study in stylistics is literature, whether that be institutionally sanctioned 'Literature' as high art or more popular 'noncanonical' forms of writing. The traditional connection between stylistics and literature brings with it two important caveats, though.

The first is that creativity and innovation in language use should not be seen as the exclusive preserve of literary writing. Many forms of discourse (advertising, journalism, popular music – even casual conversation) often display a high degree of stylistic dexterity, such that it would be wrong to view dexterity in language use as exclusive to canonical literature. The second caveat is that the techniques of stylistic analysis are as much about deriving insights about linguistic structure and function as they are about understanding literary texts. Thus, the question ‘What can stylistics tell us about literature?’ is always paralleled by an equally important question ‘What can stylistics tell us about language?’.

In spite of its clearly defined remit, methods and object of study, there remain a number of myths about contemporary stylistics. Most of the time, confusion about the compass of stylistics is a result of confusion about the compass of language. For instance, there appears to be a belief in many literary critical circles that a stylistician is simply a dull old grammarian who spends rather too much time on such trivial pursuits as counting the nouns and verbs in literary texts. Once counted, those nouns and verbs form the basis of the stylistician’s ‘insight’, although this stylistic insight ultimately proves no more far-reaching than an insight reached by simply intuiting from the text. This is an erroneous perception of the stylistic method and it is one which stems from a limited understanding of how language analysis works. True, nouns and verbs should not be overlooked, nor indeed should ‘counting’ when it takes the form of directed and focussed quantification. But the purview of modern language and linguistics is much broader than that and, in response, the methods of stylistics follow suit. It is the full gamut of the system of language that makes all aspects of a writer’s craft relevant in stylistic analysis. Moreover, stylistics is interested in language as a function of texts in context, and it acknowledges that utterances (literary or otherwise) are produced in a time, a place, and in a cultural and cognitive context. These ‘extra-linguistic’ parameters are inextricably tied up with the way a text ‘means’. The more complete and context-sensitive the description of language, then the fuller the stylistic analysis that accrues.

### **The purpose of stylistics**

Why should we do stylistics? To do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use. Doing stylistics thereby enriches our ways of thinking about language and, as observed, exploring language offers a substantial purchase on our understanding of (literary) texts. With the full array of language models at our disposal, an inherently illuminating method of analytic inquiry presents itself. This method of inquiry has an important reflexive capacity insofar as it can shed light on the very language system it derives from; it tells us about the ‘rules’ of language because it often explores texts where those rules are bent, distended or stretched to breaking point. Interest in language is always at the fore in contemporary stylistic analysis which is why you should never undertake to do stylistics unless you are interested in language.

Synthesising more formally some of the observations made above, it might be worth thinking of the practice of stylistics as conforming to the following three basic principles, cast mnemonically as three ‘Rs’. The three Rs stipulate that:

- ❑ stylistic analysis should be rigorous
- ❑ stylistic analysis should be retrievable
- ❑ stylistic analysis should be replicable.

To argue that the stylistic method be *rigorous* means that it should be based on an explicit framework of analysis. Stylistic analysis is not the end-product of a disorganised sequence of *ad hoc* and impressionistic comments, but is instead underpinned by structured models of language and discourse that explain how we process and understand various patterns in language. To argue that stylistic method be *retrievable* means that the analysis is organised through explicit terms and criteria, the meanings of which are agreed upon by other students of stylistics. Although precise definitions for some aspects of language have proved difficult to pin down exactly, there is a consensus of agreement about what most terms in stylistics mean (see A2 below). That consensus enables other stylisticians to follow the pathway adopted in an analysis, to test the categories used and to see how the analysis reached its conclusion; to retrieve, in other words, the stylistic method.

To say that a stylistic analysis seeks to be *replicable* does not mean that we should all try to copy each others' work. It simply means that the methods should be sufficiently transparent as to allow other stylisticians to verify them, either by testing them on the same text or by applying them beyond that text. The conclusions reached are principled if the pathway followed by the analysis is accessible and replicable. To this extent, it has become an important axiom of stylistics that it seeks to distance itself from work that proceeds *solely* from untested or untestable intuition.

A seemingly innocuous piece of anecdotal evidence might help underscore this point. I once attended an academic conference where a well-known literary critic referred to the style of Irish writer George Moore as 'invertebrate'. Judging by the delegates' nods of approval around the conference hall, the critic's 'insight' had met with general endorsement. However, novel though this metaphorical interpretation of Moore's style may be, it offers the student of style no retrievable or shared point of reference in language, no *metalanguage*, with which to evaluate what the critic is trying to say. One can only speculate as to what aspect of Moore's style is at issue, because the stimulus for the observation is neither retrievable nor replicable. It is as if the act of criticism itself has become an exercise in style, vying with the stylistic creativity of the primary text discussed. Whatever its principal motivation, that critic's 'stylistic insight' is quite meaningless as a description of style.

Unit A2, below, begins both to sketch some of the broad levels of linguistic organisation that inform stylistics and to arrange and sort the interlocking domains of language study that play a part in stylistic analysis. Along the thread, unit B1 explores further the history and development of stylistics, and examines some of the issues arising. What this opening unit has sought to demonstrate is that, over a decade after Lecercle's broadside, stylistics as an academic discipline continues to flourish. In that broadside, Lecercle also contends that the term *stylistics* has 'modestly retreated from the titles of books' (1993: 14). Lest they should feel afflicted by some temporary loss of their faculties, readers might just like to check the accuracy of this claim against the title on the cover of the present textbook!



# STYLISTICS AND LEVELS OF LANGUAGE

## A2

In view of the comments made in A1 on the methodological significance of the three Rs, it is worth establishing here some of the more basic categories, levels and units of analysis in language that can help organise and shape a stylistic analysis. Language in its broadest conceptualisation is not a disorganised mass of sounds and symbols, but is instead an intricate web of levels, layers and links. Thus, any utterance or piece of text is organised through several distinct *levels of language*.

### Levels of language

To start us off, here is a list of the major levels of language and their related technical terms in language study, along with a brief description of what each level covers:

Level of language	Branch of language study
The <i>sound</i> of spoken language; the way words are pronounced.	phonology; phonetics
The patterns of <i>written</i> language; the shape of language on the page.	graphology
The way words are constructed; words and their constituent structures.	morphology
The way words combine with other words to form phrases and sentences.	syntax; grammar
The words we use; the vocabulary of a language.	lexical analysis; lexicology
The <i>meaning</i> of words and sentences.	semantics
The way words and sentences are used in everyday situations; the meaning of language in context.	pragmatics; discourse analysis

These basic levels of language can be identified and teased out in the stylistic analysis of text, which in turn makes the analysis itself more organised and principled, more in keeping so to speak with the principle of the three Rs. However, what is absolutely central to our understanding of language (and style) is that these levels are inter-connected: they interpenetrate and depend upon one another, and they represent multiple and simultaneous linguistic operations in the planning and production of an utterance. Consider in this respect an unassuming (hypothetical) sentence like the following:

(1) **That puppy’s knocking over those potplants!**

In spite of its seeming simplicity of structure, this thoroughly innocuous sentence requires for its production and delivery the assembly of a complex array of linguistic components. First, there is the palpable physical substance of the utterance which, when written, comprises *graphetic substance* or, when spoken, *phonetic substance*. This

‘raw’ matter then becomes organised into linguistic structure proper, opening up the level of *graphology*, which accommodates the systematic meanings encoded in the written medium of language, and *phonology*, which encompasses the meaning potential of the sounds of spoken language. In terms of graphology, this particular sentence is written in the Roman alphabet, and in a 10 point emboldened ‘palatino’ font. However, as if to echo its counterpart in speech, the sentence-final exclamation mark suggests an emphatic style of vocal delivery. In that spoken counterpart, systematic differences in sound sort out the meanings of the words used: thus, the word-initial /n/ sound at the start of ‘knocking’ will serve to distinguish it from, say, words like ‘rocking’ or ‘mocking’. To that extent, the *phoneme* /n/ expresses a meaningful difference in sound. The word ‘knocking’ also raises an issue in *lexicology*: notice for instance how contemporary English pronunciation no longer accommodates the two word-initial *graphemes* <k> and <n> that appear in the spelling of this word. The <kn> sequence – originally spelt <cn> – has become a single /n/ pronunciation, along with equivalent occurrences in other Anglo-Saxon derived lexis in modern English like ‘know’ and ‘knee’. The double consonant pronunciation is however still retained in the vocabulary of cognate languages like modern Dutch; as in ‘knie’ (meaning ‘knee’) or ‘knoop’ (meaning ‘knot’).

Apart from these fixed features of pronunciation, there is potential for significant variation in much of the *phonetic* detail of the spoken version of example (1). For instance, many speakers of English will not sound in connected speech the ‘t’s of both ‘Tha’ and ‘potplants’, but will instead use ‘glottal stops’ in these positions. This is largely a consequence of the phonetic environment in which the ‘t’ occurs: in both cases it is followed by a /p/ consonant and this has the effect of inducing a change, known as a ‘secondary articulation’, in the way the ‘t’ is sounded (Ball and Rahilly 1999: 130). Whereas this secondary articulation is not necessarily so conditioned, the social or regional origins of a speaker may affect other aspects of the spoken utterance. A major regional difference in accent will be heard in the realisation of the historic <r> – a feature so named because it was once, as its retention in the modern spelling of a word like ‘over’ suggests, common to all accents of English. Whereas this /r/ is still present in Irish and in most American pronunciations, it has largely disappeared in Australian and in most English accents. Finally, the articulation of the ‘ing’ sequence at the end of the word ‘knocking’ may also vary, with an ‘in’ sound indicating a perhaps lower status accent or an informal style of delivery.

The sentence also contains words that are made up from smaller grammatical constituents known as *morphemes*. Certain of these morphemes, the ‘root’ morphemes, can stand as individual words in their own right, whereas others, such as prefixes and suffixes, depend for their meaning on being conjoined or bound to other items. Thus, ‘potplants’ has three constituents: two root morphemes (‘pot’ and ‘plant’) and a suffix (the plural morpheme ‘s’), making the word a three morpheme cluster. Moving up from morphology takes us into the domain of language organisation known as the *grammar*, or more appropriately perhaps, given that both lexis and word-structure are normally included in such a description, the *lexico-grammar*. Grammar is organised hierarchically according to the size of the units it contains, and most accounts of grammar would recognise the sentence as the largest unit, with the clause, phrase,

word and morpheme following as progressively smaller units (see further A3). Much could be said of the grammar of this sentence: it is a single ‘clause’ in the indicative declarative mood. It has a Subject (‘That puppy’), a Predicator (‘’s knocking over’) and a Complement (‘those potplants’). Each of these clause constituents is realised by a phrase which itself has structure. For instance, the verb phrase which expresses the Predicator has a three part structure, containing a contracted auxiliary ‘[i]s’, a main verb ‘knocking’ and a preposition ‘over’ which operates as a special kind of extension to the main verb. This extension makes the verb a *phrasal verb*, one test for which is being able to move the extension particle along the sentence to a position beyond the Complement (‘That puppy’s knocking those potplants over!’).

A semantic analysis is concerned with meaning and will be interested, amongst other things, in those elements of language which give the sentence a ‘truth value’. A truth value specifies the conditions under which a particular sentence may be regarded as true or false. For instance, in this (admittedly hypothetical) sentence, the lexical item ‘puppy’ commits the speaker to the fact that a certain type of entity (namely, a young canine animal) is responsible for the action carried out. Other terms, such as the superordinate items ‘dog’ or even ‘animal’, would still be compatible in part with the truth conditions of the sentence. That is not to say that the use of a more generalised word like, say, ‘animal’ will have exactly the same repercussions for the utterance as *discourse* (see further below). In spite of its semantic compatibility, this less specific term would implicate in many contexts a rather negative evaluation by the speaker of the entity referred to. This type of implication is *pragmatic* rather than semantic because it is more about the meaning of language in context than about the meaning of language *per se*. Returning to the semantic component of example (1), the demonstrative words ‘That’ and ‘those’ express physical orientation in language by pointing to where the speaker is situated relative to other entities specified in the sentence. This orientational function of language is known as *deixis* (see further A7). In this instance, the demonstratives suggest that the speaker is positioned some distance away from the referents ‘puppy’ and ‘potplants’. The deictic relationship is therefore ‘distal’, whereas the parallel demonstratives ‘This’ and ‘these’ would imply a ‘proximal’ relationship to the referents.

Above the core levels of language is situated *discourse*. This is a much more open-ended term used to encompass aspects of communication that lie beyond the organisation of sentences. Discourse is context-sensitive and its domain of reference includes pragmatic, ideological, social and cognitive elements in text processing. That means that an analysis of discourse explores meanings which are not retrievable solely through the linguistic analysis of the levels surveyed thus far. In fact, what a sentence ‘means’ in strictly semantic terms is not necessarily a guarantor of the kind of job it will do as an utterance in discourse. The raw semantic information transmitted by sentence (1), for instance, may only partially explain its discourse function in a specific context of use. To this effect, imagine that (1) is uttered by a speaker in the course of a two-party interaction in the living room of a dog-owning, potplant-owning addressee. Without seeking to detail the rather complex inferencing strategies involved, the utterance in this context is unlikely to be interpreted as a disconnected remark about the unruly puppy’s behaviour or as a remark which requires simply a

verbal acknowledgment. Rather, it will be understood as a call to action on the part of the addressee. Indeed, it is perhaps the very obviousness in the context of what the puppy is doing *vis-à-vis* the content of the utterance that would prompt the addressee to look beyond what the speaker ‘literally’ says. The speaker, who, remember, is positioned deictically further away from the referents, may also feel that this discourse strategy is appropriate for a better-placed interlocutor to make the required timely intervention. Yet the same discourse context can produce any of a number of other strategies. A less forthright speaker might employ a more tentative gambit, through something like ‘Sorry, but I think you might want to keep an eye on that puppy . . .’. Here, indirection serves a politeness function, although indirection of itself is not always the best policy in urgent situations where politeness considerations can be over-ridden (and see further thread 9). And no doubt even further configurations of participant roles might be drawn up to explore what other discourse strategies can be pressed into service in this interactive context.

### Summary

The previous sub-unit is no more than a thumbnail sketch, based on a single illustrative example, of the core levels of language organisation. The account of levels certainly offers a useful springboard for stylistic work, but observing these levels at work in textual examples is more the starting point than the end point of analysis. Later threads, such as 6 and 7, consider how patterns of vocabulary and grammar are sorted according to the various *functions* they serve, functions which sit at the interface between lexico-grammar and discourse. Other threads, such as 10 and 11, seek to take some account of the cognitive strategies that we draw upon to process texts; strategies that reveal that the composition of a text’s ‘meaning’ ultimately arises from the interplay between what’s in the text, what’s in the context and what’s in the mind as well. Finally, it is fair to say that contemporary stylistics ultimately looks towards *language as discourse*: that is, towards a text’s status as discourse, a writer’s deployment of discourse strategies and towards the way a text ‘means’ as a function of language in context. This is not for a moment to deny the importance of the core levels of language – the way a text is constructed in language will, after all, have a crucial bearing on the way it functions as discourse.

The interconnectedness of the levels and layers detailed above also means there is no necessarily ‘natural’ starting point in a stylistic analysis, so we need to be circumspect about those aspects of language upon which we choose to concentrate. Interaction between levels is important: one level may complement, parallel or even collide with another level. To bring this unit to a close, let us consider a brief illustration of how striking stylistic effects can be engendered by offsetting one level of language against another. The following fragment is the first three lines of an untitled poem by Margaret Atwood:

You are the sun  
in reverse, all energy  
flows into you . . .

(Atwood 1996: 47)



At first glance, this sequence bears the stylistic imprint of the *lyric poem*. This literary genre is characterised by short introspective texts where a single speaking voice expresses emotions or thoughts, and in its 'love poem' manifestation, the thoughts are often relayed through direct address in the second person to an assumed lover. Frequently, the lyric works through an essentially metaphorical construction whereby the assumed addressee is blended conceptually with an element of nature. Indeed, the lover, as suggested here, is often mapped onto the sun, which makes the sun the 'source domain' for the metaphor (see further thread 11). Shakespeare's sonnet 18, which opens with the sequence 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', is a well-known example of this type of lyrical form.

Atwood however works through this generic convention to create a startling re-orientation in interpretation. In doing so, she uses a very simple stylistic technique, a technique which essentially involves playing off the level of grammar against the level of graphology. Ending the first line where she does, she develops a linguistic *trompe l'oeil* whereby the seemingly complete grammatical structure 'You are the sun' disintegrates in the second line when we realise that the grammatical Complement (see A3) of the verb 'are' is not the phrase 'the sun' but the fuller, and rather more stark, phrase 'the sun in reverse'. As the remainder of this poem bears out, this is a bitter sentiment, a kind of 'anti-lyric', where the subject of the direct address does not embody the all-fulfilling radiance of the sun but is rather more like an energy-sapping sponge which drains, rather than enhances, the life-forces of nature. And while the initial, positive sense engendered in the first line is displaced by the grammatical 'revision' in the second, the ghost of it somehow remains. Indeed, this particular stylistic pattern works literally to establish, and then reverse, the harmonic coalescence of subject with nature.

All of the levels of language detailed in this unit will feature in various places around this book. The remainder of this thread, across to a reading in D2 by Katie Wales, is concerned with the broad resources that different levels of language offer for the creation of stylistic texture. Unit B2 explores juxtapositions between levels similar in principle to that observed in Atwood and includes commentary on semantics, graphology and morphology. In terms of its vertical progression, this section feeds into further and more detailed introductions to certain core levels of language, beginning below with an introduction to the level of grammar.

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## GRAMMAR AND STYLE

## A3

When we talk of the *grammar* of a language we are talking of a hugely complex set of interlocking categories, units and structures: in effect, the *rules* of that language. In the academic study of language, the expression 'rules of grammar' does not refer to prescriptive niceties, to the sorts of proscriptions that forbid the use of, say, a double negative or a split infinitive. These so-called 'rules' are nothing more than

a random collection of *ad hoc* and prejudiced strictures about language use. On the contrary, the genuine grammatical rules of a language are *the* language insofar as they stipulate the very bedrock of its syntactic construction in the same way that the rules of tennis or the rules of chess constitute the core organising principles of those games. This makes grammar somewhat of an intimidating area of analysis for the beginning stylistician because it is not always easy to sort out which aspects of a text's many interlocking patterns of grammar are stylistically salient. We will therefore use this unit to try to develop some useful building blocks for a study of grammar and style. The remainder of this thread examines patterns of grammar in a variety of literary texts, culminating, across in D3, with a reading by Ronald Carter which explores patterns of grammar in a 'concrete' poem by Edwin Morgan. But first, to the basics.

### A basic model of grammar

Most theories of grammar accept that grammatical units are ordered hierarchically according to their size. This hierarchy is known as a *rank scale*. As the arrangement below suggests, the rank scale sorts units in a 'consists of' relationship, progressing from the largest down to the smallest:

sentence (or clause complex)  
 clause  
 phrase (or group)  
 word  
 morpheme

As the rank scale indicates, the *morpheme* (see A2 above) is the smallest unit in grammar simply because it has no structure of its own; if it did, it would not be the bottom-most unit on the scale. Arguably the most important unit on the scale is the *clause*. The clause is especially important because it is the site of several important functions in language: it provides *tense*; it distinguishes between positive or negative *polarity*; it provides the core or 'nub' of a proposition in language; and it is where information about grammatical 'mood' (about whether a clause is declarative, interrogative or imperative) is situated. The clause will therefore be the principal focus of interest in the following discussion.

For our purposes, we can distinguish four basic elements of clause structure. These are the *Subject* (S), the *Predicator* (P), the *Complement* (C) and the *Adjunct* (A). Here are some examples of clauses which display an 'SPCA' pattern:

	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicator</b>	<b>Complement</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>
(1)	The woman	feeds	those pigeons	regularly.
(2)	Our bull terrier	was chasing	the postman	yesterday.
(3)	The Professor of Necromancy	would wear	lipstick	every Friday.



- |     |                               |        |                  |                            |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------|------------------|----------------------------|
| (4) | The Aussie actress            | looked | great            | in her latest<br>film.     |
| (5) | The man who came<br>to dinner | was    | pretty miserable | throughout the<br>evening. |

These examples highlight grammar's capacity to embed units of different sizes within one another. Notice for example how the elements of clause structure are 'filled up' by other units, like words and phrases, which occur lower down on the rank scale. Indeed, it is a defining characteristic of clause structure that its four basic elements are typically realised by certain types of phrases. For instance, the Predicator is always filled by a *verb phrase*. The Subject is typically filled by a *noun phrase* which is a cluster of words in which a noun forms the central component. The key nouns in the phrases which express the Subjects above are, respectively, 'woman', 'terrier', 'Professor', 'actress' and 'man'. The Complement position is typically filled either by a noun phrase or, as in examples (4) and (5), by an *adjective phrase* where an adjective, such as 'great' and 'miserable', features as the prominent constituent in the cluster. Finally, the Adjunct is typically filled either by an *adverb phrase* or by a *prepositional phrase*. The Adjunct elements in examples (1), (2) and (3) are all of the adverbial type. Prepositional phrases, which form the Adjunct element in (4) and (5), are clusters which are fronted by a preposition and which are normally rounded off by a noun or phrase, as in 'in (preposition) her latest film (noun phrase)'. The rule which stipulates that a verb phrase must fill up the Predicator slot is a hard and fast one, whereas the rules about what sorts of phrases go into the other three slots are less absolute and are more about typical tendencies. Later in this unit, a little more will be said about phrases (also known as 'groups') and their significance in stylistic analysis, but for the moment we need to develop further our account of clauses.

## Tests for clause constituents

We can test for the Subject, Complement and Adjunct elements of clause structure by asking various questions around the verb – assuming of course that we can find the verb! Here is a list of useful tests for sorting out clause structure:

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Finding the Subject:    | it should answer the question 'who' or 'what' placed <i>in front of</i> the verb.         |
| Finding the Complement: | it should answer the question 'who' or 'what' placed <i>after</i> the verb.               |
| Finding the Adjunct:    | it should answer questions such as 'how', 'when', 'where' or 'why' placed after the verb. |

Thus, the test for Subject in example (1) – '*who or what?* feeds those pigeons regularly' – will confirm 'The woman' as the Subject element. Alternatively, the test for Complement in example (2) – 'The man who came to dinner was *what?* throughout the evening' – will confirm the adjective phrase 'pretty miserable' as the Complement.

There is another useful test for elements of clause structure which can also be used to adduce further information about grammatical structure. Although this test will feature in a more directed way in unit B3, it is worth flagging it up here. The test involves adding a 'tag question' to the declarative form of a clause. The examples provided thus far are declarative because all of their Predicator elements come after the Subject, in the form that is standardly (though not always) used for making statements. Adding a tag, which may be of positive or negative polarity, allows the speaker or writer to alter the function of the declarative. Thus:

- (1a) The woman feeds those pigeons regularly, doesn't she?
- (2a) Our bull terrier was chasing the postman yesterday, was it?

There are several reasons why the tag is a useful tool for exploring grammatical structure. For one thing, it will always repeat the Subject element as a pronoun ('she', 'it') and it will do this irrespective of how complicated or lengthy the Subject is. It also draws out an important aspect of the Predicator in the form of an auxiliary verb ('does', 'was') which supplies amongst other things important information about tense and 'finiteness' (see further B3 and C3). The slightly awkward thing about the 'tag test' is that the questioning tag inverts the word order and often the polarity of the original clause constituents. However, if you have the good fortune to be Irish, then the Hiberno-English dialect offers an even more straightforward mechanism for testing elements of the clause. Adding an Hiberno-English emphatic tag (eg. 'so she does'; 'so it was') to the end of a declarative will repeat the Subject as a pronoun without affecting word-order or changing the polarity of the original. Thus:

- (3a) The Professor of Necromancy would wear lipstick every Friday, so she would.

The tag test, whether in the questioning or the emphatic form, still works even when the Subject element is relatively 'heavy'. In a sequence like

- (6) Mary's curious contention that mackerel live in trees proved utterly unjustified.

the appending of 'did *it*?', 'didn't *it*?' or 'so *it* did' renders down to a simple pronoun the entire sequence 'Mary's curious contention that mackerel live in trees'. This structure, which incidentally contains an embedded clause of its own, is what forms the Subject element in (6).



### Activity

The tag test can usefully differentiate between other types of grammatical structures. For example, in each of the following two examples, the Subject element is expressed by *two* noun phrases. If this is your book, write in an appropriate tag after each of the examples in the space provided:

- (7) My aunt and my uncle visit the farm regularly, \_\_\_\_\_
- (8) The winner, a local businesswoman, had donated the prize to charity, \_\_\_\_\_

Clearly, the application of our ‘who or what?’ test before the verb will reveal the Subject elements in (7) and (8) straightforwardly enough, but what the tag test further reveals is that the Subjects are of a very different order. In (7), the two noun phrases (‘My aunt’ and ‘my uncle’) refer to *different* entities which are brought together by the conjunction ‘and’. Notice how the tag will yield a plural pronoun: ‘don’t *they*?’ or ‘so *they* do’. The grammatical technique of drawing together different entities in this manner is known as *coordination* (and see further B3). In the second example, the tag test brings out a singular pronoun only (‘had *she*?’; ‘so *she* had’) which shows that in fact the two phrases ‘The winner’ and ‘a local businesswoman’ refer in different ways to the *same* entity. The term for a grammatical structure which makes variable reference to the same entity is known as *apposition*.

### Variations in basic clause structure

Whereas most of the examples provided so far exhibit a basic SPCA pattern of clause structure, it is important to note that this configuration represents only one of a number of possible combinations. Other types of grammatical *mood*, for example, involve different types of clausal patterning. A case in point is the *imperative*, which is the form typically used for requests and commands. Imperative clauses like ‘Mind your head’ or ‘Turn on the telly, please’ have no Subject element, a knock-on effect of which is that their verb always retains its base form and cannot be marked for tense. *Interrogatives*, the form typically used for asking questions, do contain Subject elements. However, many types of interrogative position part of the Predicator in front of the Subject thus:

(3b) Would the Professor of Necromancy wear lipstick every Friday?

When there isn’t enough Predicator available to release a particle for the pre-Subject position, a form of the pro-verb ‘do’ is brought into play:

(1b) Does the woman feed those pigeons regularly?

By way of footnote, the use of the verb ‘do’ for this purpose is a relatively recent development in the history of English language. In early Modern English, the SP sequence was often simply inverted to make an interrogative, as in the following absurdly anachronistic transposition of (4):

(4a) Looked the Aussie actress great in her latest film?

Declarative clauses may themselves display significant variation around the basic SPCA pattern. Pared down to its grammatical bare bones, as it were, a clause may realise S and P elements only, as in ‘The train arrived’ or ‘The lesson began’. Occasionally a clause may contain two Complements. This occurs when one of the C elements is a ‘direct object’ and the other an ‘indirect object’, as in ‘Mary gave her friend a book’ or ‘Bill told the children a story’. Notice however that both examples will still satisfy our test for Complement in that the test question is answered *twice* in each case: ‘Mary gave *who? what?*’, ‘Bill told *who? what?*’.

★ **Activity**

Adjunct elements are many and varied in terms of the forms they take and of the type of information they bring to a clause. They basically describe the *circumstances* (see A6) that attach to the process related by the clause and for that reason they can often be removed without affecting the grammaticality of the clause as a whole. Here is an example of a clause with an SPAAAA pattern. Try to sort out the four Adjuncts it contains by asking the test questions: ‘how?’ ‘where?’ ‘when?’ and ‘why?’:

- (10) Mary awoke suddenly in her hotel room one morning because of a knock on the door.

What the forgoing discussion illustrates is that, strictly speaking, neither the Subject, Complement nor Adjunct elements are essential components of clause structure. The situation regarding the Predicator element is not quite so clear-cut, however, and there has been much debate among grammarians about the status of ‘P-less’ structures. Impacting on this is the fact that much of our everyday language use involves a type of grammatical abbreviation known as *ellipsis*. For instance, if A asks ‘Where are the keys?’ and B answers ‘In your pocket!’, then B’s response, while lacking a Predicator, still implicitly retains part of the structure of the earlier question. In other words, even though B’s elliptical reply amounts to no more than a simple prepositional phrase, it still presupposes the elements of a full-blown clause. The term *minor clause* is conventionally used to describe structures, like this one, which lack a Predicator element. It is important to acknowledge minor clauses not only because these elliptical structures play an important role in much spoken interaction but also because, as the other units in this thread will argue, they form an important locus for stylistic experimentation. Finally, as a general rule of thumb, when analysing elements which *are* present in a text, there can only be one Subject element and one Predicator element of structure in any given clause. There may however be up to two Complement elements and any number of Adjunct elements.

Quite how clause structure and other types of grammatical patterning function as markers of style will be the focus of attention across the remainder of this strand, and indeed for part of unit C4 also. Next up in this introductory section of the book is the topic of sound and rhythm as it intersects with style in language. The following unit introduces therefore some key concepts used by stylisticians in their investigations of phonology and metrical patterning.

**A4**

**RHYTHM AND METRE**

Literature is, by definition, written language. This truism might suggest then that literature is not a medium especially well suited to exploration either at the linguistic level of phonology or in terms of its phonetic substance. However, sound patterning plays a pivotal role in literary discourse in general, and in poetry in particular.

Attention has been given elsewhere (unit C2) to the techniques writers use for representing *accent*, one aspect of spoken discourse, in prose fiction. This unit deals more directly with the issue of sound patterning in literature and it introduces core features, like *rhythm* and *metre*, which have an important bearing on the structure and indeed interpretation of poetry.

## Metre

When we hear someone reading a poem aloud, we tend to recognise very quickly that it is poem that is being read and not another type of text. Indeed, even if the listener cannot make out or, as is often the case for young readers, the listener doesn't understand all the words of the text, they still know that they are listening to poetry. One reason why this rather unusual communicative situation should arise is because poetry has *metre*. A pivotal criterion for the definition of verse, metre is, most simply put, an organised pattern of strong and weak syllables. Key to the definition is the proviso that metrical patterning should be *organised*, and in such a way that the alternation between accentuated syllables and weak syllables is repeated. That repetition, into a regular phrasing across a line of verse, is what makes *rhythm*. Rhythm is therefore a patterned movement of pulses in time which is defined both by periodicity (it occurs at regular time intervals) and repetition (the same pulses occur again and again).

Let us now try to work through these rather abstract definitions of metre and rhythm using some textual examples. In metrics, the *foot* is the basic unit of analysis and it refers to the span of stressed and unstressed syllables that forms a rhythmical pattern. Different sorts of metrical feet can be determined according to the number of, and ordering of, their constituent stressed and unstressed syllables. An *iambic* foot, for example, has two syllables, of which the first is less heavily stressed than the second (a 'de-dum' pattern, for want of a more formal typology). The *trochaic* foot, by contrast, reverses the pattern, offering a 'dum-de' style of metre. Here is a well-known example of the first type, a line from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751):

- (1) The ploughman homeward plods his weary way

In the following annotated version of (1), the metrical feet are segmented off from one another by vertical lines. Positioned below the text are two methods for capturing the alternation between strong (s) and weak (w) syllables:

- (1a) The plough | man home | ward plods | his wea | ry way

w s      w s      w s      w s w s  
de dum    de dum    de dum    de dum de dum

As there are five iambs in the line, this metrical scheme is *iambic pentameter*. Had there been six feet, it would have been iambic *hexameter*, four feet, iambic *tetrameter*, three feet . . . well, you can work out the rest by yourself. What is especially important about metre, as this breakdown shows, is that it transcends the lexico-grammar (see A2). Metrical boundaries are no respecters of word boundaries, a

consequence of which is that rhythm provides an additional layer of meaning potential that can be developed along Jakobson's 'axis of combination' (see B1). That extra layer can either enhance a lexico-grammatical structure, or rupture and fragment it. In respect of this point, it is worth noting the other sound imagery at work in the line from Gray. *Alliteration* is a type of rhyme scheme which is based on similarities between consonants. Although rhyme is normally thought of as a feature of line endings, the internal alliterative rhyme in (1) picks out and enhances the balancing halves of the line through the repetition of, first, the /pl/ in 'ploughman' and 'plods' and, later, the /w/ in 'weary' and 'way'. In terms of its impact on grammatical structure, the first repetition links both Subject and Predicator (see A3), while the /w/ consolidates the Complement element of the clause; taken together, both patterns give the line an *acoustic punctuation*, to use Carter and Nash's term (Carter and Nash 1990: 120). A rearrangement of the line into a structure like the following

(1b) The ploughman plods his weary way homeward

will make the acoustic punctuation redundant because the Adjunct 'homeward', which had originally separated the Subject and Complement, is simply no longer there. And of course, this rearrangement collapses entirely the original metrical scheme.

Here are some more examples of metrical patterning in verse. The following fragment from Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* (1832) is a good illustration of a trochaic pattern:

(2) By the margin, willow veiled  
Slide the heavy barges traile

Using our model of analysis, the first line of the couplet can be set out thus

(2a) By    the | margin | willow | veiled  
      s    w    s    w    s    w    s    w  
      dum de    dum de    dum de    dum de

and this will reveal, amongst other things, that (2) is an example of trochaic *tetrameter*.

The following line from W. H. Auden's poem 'The Quarry' represents another, slightly more complicated, type of versification:

(3) O what is that sound that so thrills the ear

This sequence, on my reading of it, begins with an *offbeat*. An offbeat is an unstressed syllable which, depending on the metrical structure of the line as a whole, is normally placed at the start or the end of a line of verse. In the initial position, an offbeat can act like a little phonetic springboard that helps us launch into the metrical scheme proper. Here is a suggested breakdown of the Auden line:





(3a) O | what is that | sound that so | thrills the ear  
 w s w w s w w s w w  
 de dum de de dum de de dum de de

Here the three metrical feet contain three beats apiece, and in a strong-weak-weak configuration which is known as a *dactyl*. That makes the line as whole an example of *dactylic trimeter*.

## Issues

The example from Auden raises an interesting issue to do with metrical analysis. I am sure that for many readers their scansion of (3) brings out a different metrical pattern, with stress on words other than or in addition to those highlighted in (3a). A strong pulse might for example be preferred on ‘ear’, giving the line an ‘end-weight’ focus, or maybe even on ‘so’ which would allow extra intensity to be assigned to the process of thrilling. In spite of what many metricists suggest, metrical analysis is not an exact science, and these alternative readings are in my view perfectly legitimate. Basically, while conventional phrasing dictates certain types of metrical scheme, readers of poetry have a fair amount of choice about exactly how and where to inflect a line of verse.

A contributing factor in reader choice is that the distinction between strong and weak syllables is relative, and not absolute. Consider again the line from Shakespeare’s sonnet 18 which was mentioned briefly in unit A2:

(4) Shall I | compare | thee to | a sum | mer’s day?

The line’s five metrical feet, with stress falling on the second element, clearly make it iambic pentameter. However, this classification tends to assume that all accentuation is equal, an interpretation which is not necessarily borne out when reading the line aloud. Whereas in the fourth foot (‘a sum’) the contrast in stress is clear, in the first foot (‘Shall I’), the second beat is only marginally more accentuated, if at all, than the first beat. The second foot (‘compare’) exhibits a degree of contrast somewhere between the fourth and the second, while the third foot seems to have little accentuation on either syllable. In other words, there are about four *degrees* of accentuation in this line, which we might order numerically thus:

(4) Shall I | compare | thee to | a sum | mer’s day?  
 3 4 1 4 1 2 1 4 1 4

Although the degree of contrast within metrical feet may be variable, what is important in metrical analysis is that the contrast itself be there in the first place, whatever the relative strength or weakness of its individual beats. (See further Fraser 1970: 3–7)

Now to a final issue which will wrap up this unit. While verse is (obviously) characterised by its use of metre, it does not follow that all metre is verse; and it is important not to lose sight of the fact that metre has an existence outside literature.

We need therefore to treat this stylistic feature, as we do with many aspects of style, as a common resource which is shared across many types of textual practice. By way of illustration, consider the following short example of ‘nonliterary’ discourse, an advertisement for a bathroom shower appliance:

- (5) Never undress  
for anything less!

Example (5) is a jingle; that is, a phonologically contoured text designed by advertisers as an *aide memoire*. A ‘simple’ text, to be sure, but (5) nonetheless makes use of an interesting metrical scheme. My own ‘reading’ suggests the following pattern:

- (5a)            Nev er | un dress  
                  s     w         w     s  
                  dum de         de dum
- for | an   y | thing less  
                  w     s     w         w     s  
                  de         dum de         de     dum

Notice how the couplet employs an offbeat at the start of its second line. Line-initial offbeats are commonly used to help galvanise so-called ‘four-by-four’ sequences, and example (5) does indeed contain two lines of four syllables each. The scheme is also organised into a *chiasmus*, which is a symmetrical ‘mirror image’ pattern where the strong to weak pulse (‘dum de’) is paralleled by a weak to strong pulse (‘de dum’). Overall, this four syllable pattern resembles a ‘pæonic’ metre, which is a type of metrical pattern that invites a brisk style of delivery with a ‘cantering’ tempo of recitation (Leech 1969: 112).

Other issues to do with sound and style will be taken up across this thread. In B4, attention turns to developments in the interpretation of sound symbolism in literary texts. Unit C4 offers a set of activities based on a single poem where particular emphasis is put on patterns of sound. That poem introduces, amongst other things, a different form of versification, known as *free verse*, where strict metrical schemes give way to the inflections of naturally occurring speech. Finally, the reading which rounds off this thread is Derek Attridge’s entertaining study of the significance of sound, not in poetry, but in prose.

## A5

### NARRATIVE STYLISTICS

Narrative discourse provides a way of recapitulating felt experience by matching up patterns of language to a connected series of events. In its most minimal form, a narrative comprises two clauses which are temporally ordered, such that a change in their order will result in a change in the way we interpret the assumed chronology of the narrative events. For example, the two narrative clauses in



(1) John dropped the plates and Janet laughed suddenly

suggest a temporal progression between the two actions described. Indeed, not only do we assume that John's mishap preceded Janet's response, but also that it was his mishap that brought about her response. However, reversing the clauses to form 'Janet laughed suddenly and John dropped the plates' would invite a different interpretation: that is, that Janet's laughter not only preceded but actually precipitated John's misfortune.

Of course, most narratives, whether those of canonical prose fiction or of the spontaneous stories of everyday social interaction, have rather more to offer than just two simple temporally arranged clauses. Narrative requires development, elaboration, embellishment; and it requires a sufficient degree of stylistic flourish to give it an imprint of individuality or personality. Stories narrated without that flourish will often feel flat and dull. On this issue, the sociolinguist William Labov has argued that narratives require certain essential elements of structure which, when absent, render the narrative 'ill-formed'. He cites the following attested story as an illustration:

- (2) well this person had a little too much to drink  
and he attacked me  
and the friend came in  
and she stopped it

(Labov 1972: 360)

This story, which is really only a skeleton of a fully formed narrative, was told by an adult informant who had been asked to recollect an experience where they felt they had been in real danger. True, the story does satisfy the minimum criterion for narrative in that it comprises temporally connected clauses, but it also lacks a number of important elements which are important to the delivery of a successful narrative. A listener might legitimately ask, for instance, about exactly where and when this story took place. And who was involved in the story? That is, who was the 'person' who had too much to drink and precisely whose friend was 'the friend' who stopped the attack? How, for that matter, did the storyteller come to be in the same place as the antagonist? And is the friend's act of stopping the assault the final action of the story? Clearly, much is missing from this narrative. As well as lacking sufficient contextualisation, it offers little sense of closure or finality. It also lacks any dramatic or rhetorical embellishment, and so risks attracting a rebuke like 'so what?' from an interlocutor. Reading between the lines of Labov's study, the narrator of (2) seems to have felt some discomfort about the episode narrated and was therefore rather reluctantly lured into telling the story. It may have been this factor which constrained the development of a fully articulated narrative.

There is clearly, then, more to a narrative than just a sequence of basic clauses of the sort evidenced in examples (1) and (2). However, the task of providing a full and rigorous model of narrative discourse has proved somewhat of a challenge for stylisticians. There is much disagreement about how to isolate the various units which

combine to form, say, a novel or short story, just as there is about how to explain the interconnections between these narrative units. Moreover, in the broad communicative event that is narrative, narrative *structure* is only one side of a coin of which narrative *comprehension* is the other (see further thread 10). Allowing then that a fully comprehensive description is not achievable, the remainder of this introductory unit will establish the core tenets only of a suggested model of narrative structure. It will point out which type of individual stylistic framework is best suited to which particular unit in the narrative model and will also signal whereabouts in this book each of the individual units will be explored and illustrated.

It is common for much work in stylistics and narratology to make a primary distinction between two basic components of narrative: narrative *plot* and narrative *discourse*. The term *plot* is generally understood to refer to the abstract storyline of a narrative; that is, to the sequence of elemental, chronologically ordered events which create the ‘inner core’ of a narrative. Narrative *discourse*, by contrast, encompasses the manner or means by which that plot is narrated. Narrative discourse, for example, is often characterised by the use of stylistic devices such as flashback, prevision and repetition – all of which serve to disrupt the basic chronology of the narrative’s plot. Thus, narrative discourse represents the realised text, the palpable piece of language which is produced by a story-teller in a given interactive context.

The next step involves sorting out the various stylistic elements which make up narrative discourse. To help organise narrative analysis into clearly demarcated areas of study, let us adopt the model shown in Figure A5.1.

Beyond the plot–discourse distinction, the categories towards the right of the diagram constitute six basic units of analysis in narrative description. Although there are substantial areas of overlap between these units, they nonetheless offer a useful set of reference points for pinpointing the specific aspects of narrative which can inform a stylistic analysis. Some further explanation of the units themselves is in order.

The first of the six is *textual medium*. This refers simply to the physical channel of communication through which a story is narrated. Two common narrative media

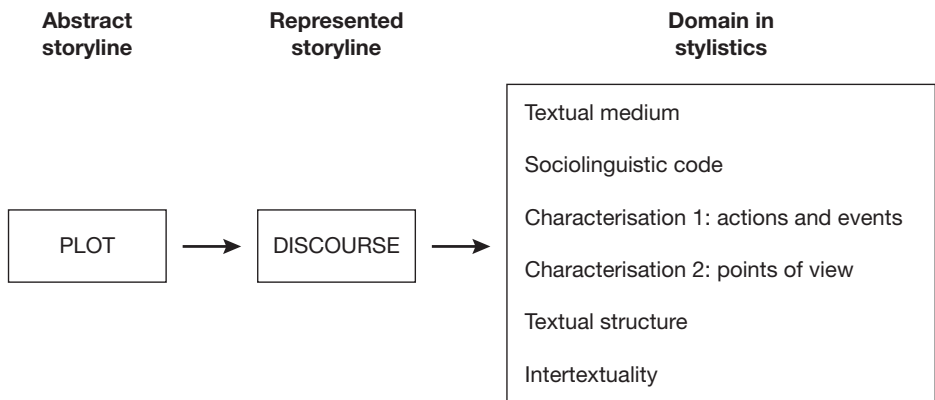


Figure A5.1 A model of narrative structure

are film and the novel, although various other forms are available such as the ballet, the musical or the strip cartoon. The examples cited thus far in this unit represent another common medium for the transmission of narrative experience: spoken verbal interaction. The concept of textual medium, in tandem with the distinction between plot and discourse, is further explored in B5.

*Sociolinguistic code* expresses through language the historical, cultural and linguistic setting which frames a narrative. It locates the narrative in time and place by drawing upon the forms of language which reflect this sociocultural context. Sociolinguistic code encompasses, amongst other things, the varieties of accent and dialect used in a narrative, whether they be ascribed to the narrator or to characters within the narrative, although the concept also extends to the social and institutional registers of discourse deployed in a story. This particular narrative resource is further explored in C2.

The first of the two characterisation elements, *actions and events*, describes how the development of character precipitates and intersects with the actions and events of a story. It accounts for the ways in which the narrative intermeshes with particular kinds of semantic process, notably those of 'doing', 'thinking' and 'saying', and for the ways in which these processes are attributed to characters and narrators. This category, which approaches narrative within the umbrella concept of 'style as choice', is the main focus of attention across the units in strand 6.

The second category of narrative characterisation, *point of view*, explores the relationship between mode of narration and a character's or narrator's 'point of view'. Mode of narration specifies whether the narrative is relayed in the first person, the third person or even the second person, while point of view stipulates whether the events of story are viewed from the perspective of a particular character or from that of an omniscient narrator, or indeed from some mixture of the two. The way speech and thought processes are represented in narrative is also an important index of point of view, although this stylistic technique has a double function because it relates to actions and events also. Point of view in narrative is examined across strand 7, while speech and thought presentation is explored in strand 8.

*Textual structure* accounts for the way individual narrative units are arranged and organised in a story. A stylistic study of textual structure may focus on large-scale elements of plot or, alternatively, on more localised features of story's organisation; similarly, the particular analytic models used may address broad-based aspects of narrative coherence or they may examine narrower aspects of narrative cohesion in organisation. Textual structure (as it organises narrative) is the centre of interest across the remainder of this strand (B5, C5, D5).

The term *intertextuality*, the sixth narrative component, is reserved for the technique of 'allusion'. Narrative fiction, like all writing, does not exist in a social and historical vacuum, and it often echoes other texts and images either as 'implicit' intertextuality or as 'manifest' intertextuality. In a certain respect, the concept of intertextuality overlaps with the notion of sociolinguistic code in its application to narrative, although the former involves the importing of other, external texts while the latter refers more generally to the variety or varieties of language in and through which a narrative is developed. Both of these constituents feature in units C1 and C2.

## A6

## STYLE AS CHOICE

Much of our everyday experience is shaped and defined by actions and events, thoughts and perceptions, and it is an important function of the system of language that it is able to account for these various 'goings on' in the world. This means encoding into the grammar of the clause a mechanism for capturing what we say, think and do. It also means accommodating in grammar a host of more abstract relations, such as those that pertain between objects, circumstances and logical concepts. When language is used to represent the goings on of the physical or abstract world in this way, to represent patterns of experience in spoken and written texts, it fulfils the *experiential* function. The experiential function is an important marker of style, especially so of the style of narrative discourse, because it emphasises the concept of *style as choice*. There are many ways of accounting in language for the various events that constitute our 'mental picture of reality' (Halliday 1994: 106); indeed, there are often several ways of using the resources of the language system to capture the *same* event in a textual representation. What is of interest to stylisticians is why one type of structure should be preferred to another, or why, from possibly several ways of representing the same 'happening', one particular type of depiction should be privileged over another. Choices in style are motivated, even if unconsciously, and these choices have a profound impact on the way texts are structured and interpreted.

The particular grammatical facility used for capturing experience in language is the system of *transitivity*. In the present account, the concept of 'transitivity' is used in an expanded semantic sense, much more so than in traditional grammars where it simply serves to identify verbs which take direct objects. Transitivity here refers to the way meanings are encoded in the clause and to the way different types of *process* are represented in language. Transitivity normally picks out three key components of processes. The first is the process itself, which is typically realised in grammar by the *verb phrase* (see A3). The second is the *participant(s)* associated with the process, typically realised by *noun phrases*. Perhaps less importantly for stylistic analysis, transitivity also picks out the *circumstances* associated with the process. This third element is typically expressed by *prepositional* and *adverb* phrases which, as we saw in A3, fill up the Adjunct element in clause structure.

Linguists working with this functional model of transitivity are divided about how exactly to 'carve up' the experiential function. How many sorts of experience, for example, should the system distinguish? How easy is it to place discrete boundaries around certain types of human experiences when those experiences tend to overlap or shade into one another? In the brief account of transitivity that follows, six types of process are identified, although the divisions between these processes will always be more provisional than absolute.

*Material* processes, the first of the six, are simply processes of *doing*. Associated with material processes are two inherent participant roles which are the *Actor*, an obligatory role in the process, and a *Goal*, a role which may or may not be involved in the process. The following two examples of material processes follow the standard notation conventions which place the textual example above its individual transitivity roles:



- |     |                     |             |         |
|-----|---------------------|-------------|---------|
| (1) | I                   | nipped      | Daniel. |
|     | Actor               | Process     | Goal    |
| (2) | The washing machine | broke down. |         |
|     | Actor               | Process     |         |

*Mental* processes constitute the second key process of the transitivity system and are essentially processes of *sensing*. Unlike material processes which have their provenance in the physical world, mental processes inhabit and reflect the world of consciousness, and involve cognition (encoded in verbs such as ‘thinking’ or ‘wondering’), reaction (as in ‘liking’ or ‘hating’) and perception (as in ‘seeing’ or ‘hearing’). The two participant roles associated with mental processes are the Sensor (the conscious being that is doing the sensing) and the Phenomenon (the entity which is sensed, felt, thought or seen). Here are illustrations of the three main types of mental process:

- |     |         |            |                 |              |
|-----|---------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| (3) | Mary    | understood | the story.      | (cognition)  |
|     | Sensor  | Process    | Phenomenon      |              |
| (4) | Anil    | noticed    | the damp patch. | (perception) |
|     | Sensor  | Process    | Phenomenon      |              |
| (5) | Siobhan | detests    | paté.           | (reaction)   |
|     | Sensor  | Process    | Phenomenon      |              |

The roles of Sensor and Phenomenon relate exclusively to mental processes. This distinction is necessary because the entity ‘sensed’ in a mental process is not directly affected by the process, and this makes it of a somewhat different order to the role of Goal in a material process. It is also an important feature of the semantic basis of the transitivity system that the participant roles remain constant under certain types of grammatical operation. Example (5), for instance, might be rephrased as ‘Paté disgusts Siobhan’, yet ‘Siobhan’ still remains the Sensor and ‘Paté’ the Phenomenon.

A useful check which often helps distinguish material and mental processes is to test which sort of present tense best suits the particular example under analysis. The ‘natural’ present tense for mental processes is the simple present, so the transformation of the past tense of example (3) would result in ‘Mary understands the story’. By contrast, material processes normally gravitate towards the present continuous tense, as in the transposition of (2) to ‘The washing machine is breaking down’. When transposed to the present continuous, however, mental processes often sound odd: ‘Siobhan is detesting paté’, ‘Anil is noticing the damp patch’ and so on.

There is a type of process which to some extent sits at the interface between material and mental processes, a process which represents both the activities of ‘sensing’ and ‘doing’. *Behavioural* processes embody physiological actions like ‘breathe’ or ‘cough’, although they sometimes portray these processes as states of consciousness as in ‘sigh’, ‘cry’ or ‘laugh’. They also represent processes of consciousness as forms of behaviour, as in ‘stare’, ‘dream’ or ‘worry’. The key (and normally sole) participant in behavioural processes is the Behavior, the conscious entity who is ‘behaving’:

- |     |              |             |                      |  |
|-----|--------------|-------------|----------------------|--|
| (6) | That student | fell asleep | in my lecture again. |  |
|     | Behavior     | Process     | Circumstance         |  |
| (7) | She          | frowned     | at the mess.         |  |
|     | Behavior     | Process     | Circumstances        |  |

The role of Behavior is very much like that of a Sensor, although the behavioural process itself is grammatically more akin to a material process. Thus, while both examples above display many of the characteristics of mental processes, our ‘tense’ test satisfies the criteria for material processes: ‘That student is falling asleep . . .’; ‘She is frowning . . .’.

Close in sense to mental processes, insofar as they articulate conscious thought, are processes of *verbalisation*. These are processes of ‘saying’ and the participant roles associated with verbalisation are the Sayer (the producer of the speech), the Receiver (the entity to which the speech is addressed) and the Verbiage (that which gets said). Thus:

- |     |              |           |                                  |                |
|-----|--------------|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| (8) | Mary         | claimed   | that the story had been changed. |                |
|     | Sayer        | Process   | Verbiage                         |                |
| (9) | The minister | announced | the decision                     | to parliament. |
|     | Sayer        | Process   | Verbiage                         | Receiver       |

Notice how the Verbiage participant, which, incidentally, is not a term used in any derogatory sense, can cover either the ‘content’ of what was said (as in 8) or the ‘name’, in speech act terms, of what was said (as in 9). It is also important to note that the process of saying needs to be interpreted rather broadly, so that even an inanimate Sayer can be accommodated: ‘The notice said be quiet’.

Now to an important and deceptively complex category: *relational processes*. These are processes of ‘being’ in the specific sense of establishing relationships between two entities. Relational processes can be expressed in a number of ways, and not all of the numerous classifications which present themselves can be accommodated here. There is however general agreement about three main types of relational process. An *intensive* relational process posits a relationship of equivalence, an ‘x is y’ connection, between two entities, as in: ‘Paula’s presentation was lively’ or ‘Joyce is the best Irish writer’. A possessive relational process plots an ‘x has y’ type of connection between two entities, as in ‘Peter has a piano’ or ‘The Alpha Romeo is Clara’s’. Thirdly, *circumstantial* relational processes are where the circumstantial element becomes upgraded, as it were, so that it fulfils the role of a full participant in the process. The relationship engendered is a broad ‘x is at/is in/is on/is with/ y’ configuration, realised in constructions like ‘The fête is on all day’, ‘The maid was in the parlour’ or ‘The forces of darkness are against you’.

This seemingly straightforward three-way classification is rather complicated by the fact that it intersects with another distinction between *attributive* and *identifying* relational processes. This means that each of the three types come in two modes, yielding six categories in total. The grid shown in Table A6.1 will help summarise this





Table A6.1 Relational processes grid

Type	Mode attributive	identifying
intensive	Paula’s presentation was lively	The best Irish writer is Joyce Joyce is the best Irish writer
possessive	Peter has a piano	The Alpha Romeo is Clara’s Clara’s is the Alpha Romeo
circumstantial	The fête is on all day	The maid is in the parlour In the parlour is the maid

classification. In the attributive mode, the entity, person or concept being described is referred to as the Carrier, while the role of Attribute refers to the quality ascribed to that Carrier. The Attribute therefore says what the Carrier is, what the Carrier is like, where the Carrier is, what it owns and so on. In the identifying mode, one role is identified through reference to another such that the two halves of the clause often refer to the same thing. This means that unlike attributive processes, all identifying processes are reversible, as the grid above shows. In terms of their participant roles, one entity (the Identifier) picks out and defines the other (the Identified). Thus, in the pattern:

- (10) Joyce                      is                      the best Irish writer  
          Identified              Process              Identifier

the sequence ‘the best Irish writer’ functions to identify ‘Joyce’ as the key representative of a particular class of individuals. The alternative pattern, ‘The best Irish writer is Joyce’, simply reverses the sequence of these two participant roles.

*Existential* processes constitute the sixth and last category of the transitivity model. Close in sense to relational processes, these processes basically assert that something exists or happens. Existential processes typically include the word ‘there’ as a dummy subject, as in ‘There was an assault’ or ‘Has there been a phone call?’, and they normally only contain one participant role, the ‘Existent’, realised respectively in these examples by ‘an assault’ and ‘a phone call’.

In another sense, the existential process leads us right back to the material process, the category with which we began this review of the system of transitivity. Significantly, both types of process can often accommodate a question like ‘what happened?’, the response to which results in two possible configurations. Thus, both ‘X assaulted Y’ and ‘There was an assault’ would offer a choice of responses to this hypothetical question. However, what happens in the existential version is that no role other than Existent is specified, and that role, moreover, is filled by a *nominalised* element which is created by converting a verbal process into a noun (see C3).

It is worth reemphasising this idea of ‘style as choice’ in transitivity, and in this respect consider an anecdotal example. When questioned about some rowdiness that

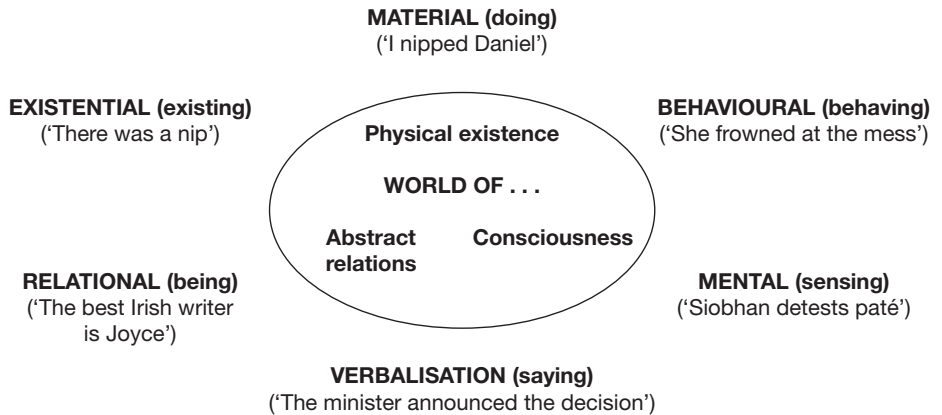


Figure A6.1 A model of transitivity

resulted in a slight injury to his younger brother, my (then five year old) son replied: ‘There was a nip’. This is an interesting experiential strategy because it satisfies the question ‘what happened’ while simultaneously avoiding any material process that would support an explicit Actor role. It manages in other words to sidestep precisely the configuration displayed in example (1) above, ‘I nipped Daniel’, where the role of Actor is conflated with the speaker. Another strategy might have been to create a passive, as opposed to active, construction, wherein the Goal element is brought into Subject position and the Actor element removed from the clause entirely (‘Daniel was nipped’). However, because the passive still supports the question ‘by whom?’, this configuration retains a degree of *implicit* agency. The general point is that transitivity offers systematic choice, and any particular textual configuration is only one, perhaps strategically motivated, option from a pool of possible textual configurations.

The core processes of transitivity, arranged so as to capture their interrelationship to one another, are summarised in Figure A6.1. The transitivity model has proved an important methodological tool in stylistics and in more general investigations of text. The remainder of this strand surveys some developments in this area and goes on to examine patterns of transitivity in a variety of texts. The thread concludes with a reading by Deirdre Burton (D6) which applies the model to a passage from Sylvia Plath’s novel *The Bell Jar*.

## A7

## STYLE AND POINT OF VIEW

The *perspective* through which a story is told constitutes an important stylistic dimension not only in prose fiction but in many types of narrative text. Much of the feel, colour or texture of a story is a direct consequence of the sort of narrative framework it employs. A story may for instance be told in the first person and from the viewing