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Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, 1961
Michael Frayn, *Towards the End of the Morning*, 1967
George MacDonald Fraser, *Flashman*, 1970
Tom Sharpe, *Porterhouse Blue*, 1974
Leslie Thomas, *Tropic of Ruislip*, 1974
Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man*, 1975
David Lodge, *Changing Places*, 1975
Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, 1979
Stanley Elkin, *The Dick Gibson Show*, 1983
Howard Jacobson, *Coming from Behind*, 1983
David Nobbs, *Second from Last in the Sack Race*, 1983
Sue Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 3/4*, 1983
Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegone Days*, 1985
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List compiled by John Hart, himself the author of a comic novel: *Jizz*, 1992

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Text Linguistics at Work

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Text linguistic methods have something to offer those that work with and teach text analysis—both for literary and non-literary texts.

The term text linguistics is used, not very systematically, to cover several kinds of analysis dealing with units larger than the sentence. This means that the field of text linguistics now caters for much that used to be found under grammar, stylistics, rhetoric etc. For text analysis, this is ideal, as the over-all impression of a text is of course made up of all these categories.

In the following, I shall present a selection of categories that I have found useful in teaching text analysis. There is no attempt to cover even the most important text linguistic methods in a systematic way (I have done so elsewhere, in Bülow-Møller, 1989), so the observations here represent no more than a supplement of linguistic features that may not strike the eye immediately. The categories are, however, selected within the main subareas, which for the present purpose have been grouped as **semantic choice, syntactic transformation, cohesion, presupposition and pragmatic expectation.**

1. Language as choice between options

Speakers (a term that covers writers below) reveal much about themselves in their selection of lexis and syntax; this goes not only for gender, education etc., but also for their norms and standards and interests. Where this process is replicated in literature, a character assumes an individual 'voice' through the use of those same linguistic features. In "linguistic criticism", this is called a 'mind style' (see e.g. Fowler, 1986, Leech and Short, 1981, Peer, 1988). To illustrate the categories I have chosen, I shall quote the 'voice' of Muriel Spark's young girl Lorna, whose monologue makes up the short story "You should have seen the mess", to show how a few symptomatic linguistic choices help to create a character.

1.1: Lexical choice

In the field of semantics, I find that students are adept at picking up the phenomenon of over- and underlexicalisation, where a speaker's choice of terms demonstrates detailed knowledge or ignorance of a

subject. That goes for connotations, too: When Lorna describes the kitchen as "done up in *primrose and white*" and the living room as "*pale rose with white woodwork*", students easily diagnose the floral colours as stemming from the world of ladies' magazines (emphasis added in all quotations). It is far harder for them to see the idea of a semantic choice between candidates where there is no firm cultural evaluation attached, and where a term looks objective as long as it is not juxtaposed with a competitor. Analyses of such submerged choices are often slanted towards the pragmatic and ideological; the practitioners of "Critical Linguistics" include Fowler et al., 1979, Hodge and Kress, 1988, and Fairclough, 1989.

The category I want to draw attention to here is that of **perspective,** where the choice of word reveals the speaker's more or less conscious interests. The classic case is whether one chooses to describe a given bottle as *half empty* or *half full*, or whether a particular transaction involving transfer of money and goods is called *selling* or *buying.*

By paying attention to perspective, radio listeners could identify the press bureau behind single news items during the talks to integrate the two Germanies: what most of Europe called the *4+2 talks* was referred to as the *2+4 talks* when the source was German.

Perspective is not necessarily independent of connotations: euphemism may work precisely through a shift in perspective. Thus James Baker, the US Secretary of State, has recently taken to calling the *brain drain* from Russia the *brain harvest.*

Lorna's mental categories clearly show whose side she is on: when she accompanies her friends on a visit to a flat in Curzon Street, she calls it "a nice place, but there was no Welfare Centre to the flats, where people could go for *social intercourse, advice, and guidance*". Her choice reflects the perspective of the social worker, as if the occupiers are all potential clients.

1.2: Assigning responsibility

In the verb phrase, the most important category to look for is **transitivity** in the sense of Hopper and Thompson, 1980: the amount of 'action force' in a given verb, measured in terms of agentivity, goal-directedness, concreteness (and several other parameters). It is crucially important to establish if a text sees a given event as a mere occurrence or as an act done by an agent; the choice for the 'same' accident might include *she smashed the car to bits* (agent, telic verb), *she damaged the car* (atelic), *the car got damaged* (no agent) and *the accident involved some damage to personal property* (abstract).

For an illustration of the influence of this choice, a well-known experiment by Loftus and Palmer tested people's reactions to word-

ing. Several groups saw a film of a car accident and answered questions some time later, among other things about the speed of the cars involved. For one group, the question was how fast the "car was travelling when it *smashed into* the other car"; for other groups, the verbs were *bump, hit* and *contact.* The first group estimated a far higher speed, and they said that they remembered details like broken headlights, which were manifestly not in the film (Loftus and Palmer, 1974). Obviously the word *smash* triggered a mental frame involving damage.

Perspective and transitivity together will express the speaker's view of 'who does what to whom'. Creative use is often found round taboos: Lorna's friend Mavis has a baby, which is noted by Lorna with the phrase *after the baby boy came along.* This choice does away with all notions of copulation and birth in favour of a voluntary decision by the baby. Lorna also says of her relations with her boyfriend that *he never tried to go to the full extent,* another interesting low-transitivity choice that involves only one person, and in a completely abstract activity (cf. 'we never made love'). Lorna herself is not involved.

1.3: Syntactic choice

Years of experience have eroded the myth started by the transformational grammarians that transformations did not carry any change in meaning. **Transformations** are one of the most powerful tools in setting a particular tone in a message—and the choice of, say, an official tone must have a different meaning from an unmarked or personal message, if only because the effect, and the possible answers invited, are different. In the cited works by the "critical linguists" there are checklists of transformations to watch for when power relations are manipulated in texts.

The most important single function of the transformations is to **depersonalise.** Three varieties to watch for:

a) the passive, which may be used to eliminate an agent and thus make the message impersonal: in *Trespassers will be prosecuted,* the empty agent slot (normally the sentence subject) invites the assumption that the subject is responsible, as in 'trespassers will get themselves prosecuted'.

b) nominalisation, which not only removes the agent, but also shifts the action to an abstract noun: *NO PARKING* really means 'I forbid you to park any vehicle here', but the absence of the people involved in the prohibition makes it extremely difficult to argue with, which is of course the point.

c) shift to adjective: participles and some adjectives retain a verbal element, which may serve to mask the underlying process. A *highly*

desirable outcome, for example, describes only the outcome; attention is shifted from the underlying '(somebody) desires such an outcome'. Further, a pre-nominal adjective is syntactically placed where the sentence information is not directed towards it; it is 'given' and therefore invulnerable to disagreement—cf. *"This outcome is desirable"*—"No, it isn't", vs. *"This desirable outcome is due to your barrister"*—"No, it isn't". In the latter case, the desirablity is outside the scope of the negation.

2. Understanding through expectation

Theories of co-operation and relevance show that hearers understand utterances in the way they see as most immediately relevant (see Grice, 1967, Sperber and Wilson, 1986). This means that a message requires a shared framework to work smoothly.

2.1: Understanding relations between clauses

The mechanism can be seen in action in the areas of **cohesion,** e.g. with the class of **connectors**, the conjunctions and adverbial phrases used to signal the relationship between parts of text.

A shared framework is certainly required with the **adversarial** connectors, typically *but*: they signal that the next word or phrase is really contrary to expectation. Thus *poor but honest* requires the reader to retrospectively agree that to be 'poor', for us decent folk, is to be 'probably dishonest'. Try the effect of *Republican but honest*.

The large and difficult relation type called **cause and effect** can be marked with *as, in consequence, so* etc., or it can be left implicit. If the expectations are shared, it requires no extra work to read *He won the pools last month—they are moving to a much bigger house* as involving cause and effect. The explicit use of 'logical' conjunctions, on the other hand, is over-represented in texts where the speaker is at pains to appear reasonable and argue logically; I have found the clearest case of such explicitness in tapes of British negotiations.

As it happens, Lorna's favourite conjunctions are *but* and *as*: "He gave me several gifts over the period, which I took *as* he would have only given them away, *but* he never tried to go to the full extent." Her many instances of *as* mark her account as keen to show an irreproachably reasonable front, and the reversal of expectation between gift-giving and 'full extent' reveals what she considers the normal (causal) connection.

2.2: The use of shared expectations

The last category in this mini-survey is **presupposition**: that part of the sentence that cannot logically be denied. The classic instance is *Have you stopped beating your wife?*, with its varieties *When did you stop, With what did you beat* etc. Whether the answer is yes or no, the respondent is forced to 'buy' the presupposition that he did indeed

beat his wife. The presupposition, in other words, is that part of the sentence that is marked as already accepted and hence as uncontroversial. Similarly, many lexical items can only be used if preconditions obtain; thus *wake up* presupposes that the hearer is at present asleep. Such apparently shared expectations are widely used in propaganda, here from a list in a manifesto from the National Front:

What we stand for:
- ★ The return of leadership and statesmanship to British affairs […]
- ★ A government that will put British interests first […]
- ★ The elimination of Communism in the media, in the factory, and in the school room.

A rather looser usage of the term is found in what is called 'pragmatic presupposition'—again something that the speaker evidently considers shared. The most important trace in text is the use of **negation**: why mention what is **not** the case, unless there is a good reason to expect the opposite? In this way, negations can be read as pointing directly to something that the speaker either considers a norm or expects the hearer to expect. Thus Lorna describes her boyfriend mostly in terms of his lack of order and hygiene: "He was young, dark with a dark shirt, so one *could not see right away if he was clean*"… "The light [in his studio] was very dim, but I could see *the bed had not been made, and the sheets were far from clean*".

Shared expectations at one remove are also responsible for the phenomenon of **irony**. According to the account by Sperber and Wilson, 1981, the ironic utterance is produced in quotation marks, as it were, as an 'echo' of somebody else's choice (somebody who is overly naive, or much too sweet, or who would say, "Oh, don't bother about little *me*!" even when the situation called for some attention). Irony can only be heard if speaker and hearer share expectations of what can reasonably be said.
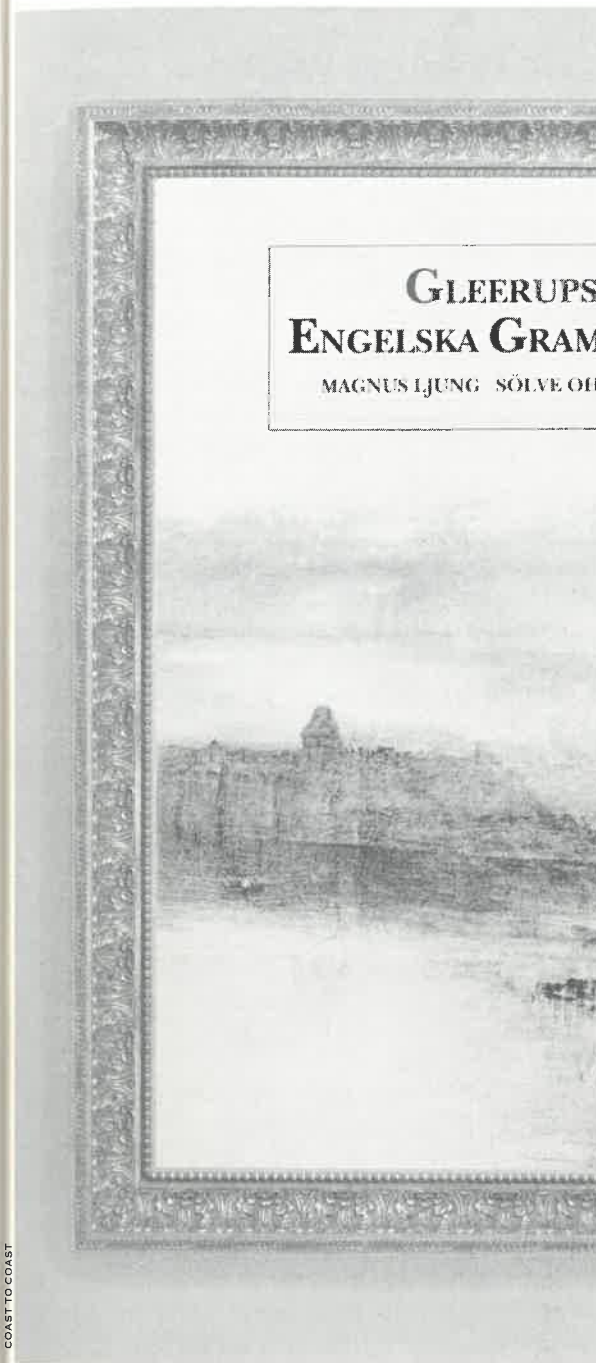
Lorna's style is devoid of both humour and irony. But this does not protect the character from the **author**'s irony: the more naive or bigotted Lorna appears, the more author and reader 'exchange glances' over her shoulder when she reveals tastes and standards that we do not share. Thus,

> "When we arrived at Jim's mother's place, Jim said, 'It's a fourteenth-century cottage, Lorna.' I could well believe it. It was very cracked and old, and it made one wonder how Jim could let his old mother live in this tumble-down cottage, as he was so good to everyone else."

This, then, is a feature that is not in the text and not to be picked up by linguistic analysis except in a wider context of understanding. If text linguistics has made one significant contribution, it is by insisting that interpretation always depends on the whole situation, with its participants, genre traits and purposes; or, as a famous Dane very nearly said, "There is nothing either good or bad but context makes it so.".

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