

<CT>STYLISTICS: STUDYING LITERARY AND EVERYDAY STYLE IN ENGLISH</CT>

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<H1>1. INTRODUCTION</H1>

Stylistics is often defined as the linguistic study of style in language; but what does this mean in practice? The first point to note is that style arises from motivated choice (motivated in the sense of there being a range of linguistic options from which to choose rather than that choice necessarily being a conscious one). It is only when we have such a choice that it is possible for a style to emerge. As an example of what this means, consider this statement from the American actor Clint Eastwood, made in response to an interviewer's suggestion that the Republican 2016 US presidential candidate, Donald Trump, had been trying to emulate Eastwood's tough-guy persona:

<EXT>

Maybe. But he's onto something, because secretly everybody's getting tired of political correctness, kissing up. That's the kiss-ass generation we're in right now. We're really in a pussy generation.

<SRC>(Clint Eastwood, quoted in [Hainey 2016](#))</SRC>

</EXT>

Eastwood's phrase 'pussy generation' garnered widespread attention and was widely quoted in reports of the interview in other news outlets. One reason for this is that the soundbite is both provocative and acts as an exemplar of Eastwood's public persona; i.e. that of the forthright everyman who sticks to his straight-talking style whatever the context. There is nothing unusual about Eastwood's turn of phrase to anyone familiar with the way he typically presents himself. Why, then, should this particular part of the interview have been quoted so much when others could also have been chosen to convey his straight-talking style? Part of the answer is that Eastwood's lexical choice generates additional effects. *Pussy* is a

euphemism for female genitalia and to use this as a term of abuse, as Eastwood does, is outside the politeness norms of public discourse. That Eastwood chooses to use the phrase is indicative of his either not considering or not caring how this might be interpreted by readers. His stylistic choice creates an interpretative effect which, depending on the reader, may lead to him being perceived as misogynistic, crass, foolish or even, if the reader shares his viewpoint, admirable. The extract is therefore attention-grabbing as a result of being highly provocative; and in the world of internet journalism this makes it perfect clickbait.

This example illustrates some of the fundamental concepts of stylistics. Style arises from motivated choice and choices have consequences. Stylistic analysis necessitates both linguistic description and an assessment of the interpretative consequences of whatever choice has been made. The functions of stylistic choice might be to construct particular styles (e.g. genre style, authorial style), to generate particular literary effects (such as point of view), to convey certain ideologies or to trigger particular emotional responses in the reader. These are just some of a wide range of possibilities and it is important to note that these effects can be created in both fiction and non-fiction texts. There is, then, no reason why stylistic analysis should be confined to literary fiction, though it is undeniably the case that most contemporary stylisticians are particularly interested in literature (we discuss the issue of 'literary' and 'non-literary' stylistics in more detail in section 3.1).

At the heart of stylistics is the concept of foregrounding. This originates in the work of the Russian Formalists (see, for example, [Mukařovský 1964 \[1932\]](#) and [Shklovsky 1965 \[1917\]](#)), who hypothesised that the elements of a text that readers will pay most attention to are those that in some way deviate from an expected norm (i.e. are foregrounded against a perceived background). [Van Peer \(1986\)](#) provides experimental support for the notion of foregrounding, demonstrating too that what is likely to be perceived as foregrounded can be predicted. [Miall and Kuiken \(1994a, 1994b\)](#) have also shown experimentally that the extent to which linguistic deviation is present in a text can be used as a predictor of what readers will

perceive to be foregrounded. Furthermore, they show that foregrounded features of a text provoke emotional responses and prolong reading time. Unsurprisingly, then, foregrounding theory is central to stylistics since its predictive power gives stylisticians a means of accounting for why particular stylistic choices might elicit particular responses in readers. Ultimately, this is what stylisticians are concerned with doing. This chapter introduces some of the key areas and practices within stylistics today, focusing particularly on how these areas and practices relate to the concept of foregrounding. We begin by outlining classic and recent work in foregrounding theory before going on to consider how its central tenets can be observed in current work in cognitive and corpus stylistics. We then discuss two particular issues that we believe are crucial to contemporary conceptualisations of stylistics. One of these – the issue of objectivity in analysis – has been both widely debated and greatly misunderstood. We aim to clarify what objectivity means and how this impacts on stylistic analysis. The second issue is one which we believe has not been discussed enough by stylisticians. This is the issue of what is meant by the terms *literary* and *non-literary stylistics*. Our view is that this distinction is unhelpful and contradicts one of the basic premises of stylistics, namely that there is no distinction to be made on formal grounds between the language of literature and the language of everyday discourse. Finally, we discuss what we believe to be the likely future directions for stylistics.

<H1>2. CURRENT CRITICAL ISSUES AND TOPICS</H1>

<H2>2.1 Foregrounding, deviation and parallelism</H2>

Choice is fundamental to the composition of style in many areas of everyday life. For example, our clothing and musical choices all form part of how we style our own identity. In the same way, linguistic choices give rise to particular stylistic effects in language. Foregrounding occurs when our linguistic expectations are not met. It is caused by two phenomena: linguistic deviation and linguistic parallelism. Deviation 'is essentially the occurrence of unexpected irregularity in language and results in foregrounding on the basis that the irregularity is

surprising to the reader' (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010: 31); by contrast, parallelism is 'unexpected regularity' (2010: 32). The concepts of deviation, parallelism and foregrounding are central to stylistic analysis, even in contemporary sub-fields such as cognitive stylistics and corpus stylistics, as we will show. In the next section we demonstrate the application of foregrounding theory analytically as a precursor to discussing its psychological validity, as demonstrated through experiment.

<H2>2.2 Foregrounding and levels of language</H2>

Foregrounding can occur at any linguistic level, from those at the formal end of the scale (e.g. phonology) to those that are more functional in nature (e.g. pragmatics). In this section we demonstrate by reference to a selection of linguistic levels how deviation from linguistic norms can generate foregrounding effects.

<H3>Semantics</H3>

Semantic foregrounding exploits expectations about lexical or sentence-level meaning. Consider the lyrics below from the Joanna Newsom song, 'Peach, Plum, Pear':

<EXT>

you were knocking me down with the palm of your eye

<SRC>(Joanna Newsom, 'Peach, Plum Pear', 2004)</SRC>

</EXT>

The line 'with the palm of your eye' is foregrounded as a result of semantic deviation; eyes do not have palms. Newsom appears to be describing a situation in which the narrator is attempting to work out the intentions of someone she is romantically interested in through the way they look at her. The impact on the narrator is described in terms of a conceptual metaphor (A LOOK IS PHYSICAL FORCE; see Lakoff and Johnson 2003), which is made novel by the semantic deviation which suggests that eyes are constituted like hands (i.e. they have palms) and can be used to physically push people. The literary effect of the foregrounding is to emphasise the effect of a single look from the narrator's object of desire.

<H3>Pragmatics</H3>

While semantics is concerned with lexical and sentence-level meaning, pragmatics is concerned with meaning in interaction, and how this is shaped by context. The study of pragmatic meaning in stylistics makes extensive use of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which stipulates that interactants make their 'conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk' (Grice 1975: 45). Grice's Cooperative Principle is based on the maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner (Grice 1975: 45–46).

The extract below is from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, a novel by Mark Haddon. The story is narrated in the first person by the main character, 15-year-old Christopher. Although the novel does not label Christopher as autistic, Haddon has since commented that Christopher's character does have a form of autism and the book was widely acclaimed for its depiction of the condition. At the start of the novel, Christopher is found at the side of his neighbour's dog, Wellington, who has been killed with a garden fork. When the police arrive, Christopher is suspected of having killed the dog and is taken to the police station to be questioned about his role in the death of Wellington:

<EXT>

They asked me if I had any family. I said I did. They asked me who my family was. I said it was Father, but Mother was dead. And I said it was also Uncle Terry, but he was in Sunderland and he was Father's brother, and it was my grandparents, too, but three of them were dead and Grandma Burton was in a home because she had senile dementia and thought that I was someone on television.

<SRC>(Haddon 2003: 17)</SRC>

</EXT>

In his questioning of Christopher, the police officer asks if he has any family, and Christopher confirms that he does. Given Christopher's young age and our schematic knowledge about

police protocols, we can assume that the policeman needs to find out from Christopher who his guardians are in order to contact them and tell them that he is with the police. The illocutionary force of the police officer's utterance is a command ('Give me the details of an adult to contact'). However, Christopher does not understand the implicature and instead simply confirms that he does have a family. In effect, Christopher infringes (Thomas 1995) the Gricean maxim of quantity, as his response does not give the police officer enough information (note here that *infringe* rather than *flout* is used as Christopher is not intentionally breaking the maxim). Given that the police officer has not achieved the desired perlocutionary effect (i.e. Christopher revealing his father's name), he reframes his question to be more explicit. In answer to this reframed question, Christopher infringes two maxims: (i) quantity, by not interpreting the question as 'who are your immediate family', therefore giving too much information, and (ii) relation, by giving information that is not relevant to the current exchange (e.g. that his Grandma is senile and does not recognise him).

The foregrounding that arises from Christopher's pragmatic deviation generates the sense of the character having a deviant mind style (Semino 2014). Christopher is unable to interpret the illocutionary force and intended perlocutionary effect of the policeman's questions. A typical conversational participant (by the terms of Grice's Cooperative Principle) would be able to do this. Moreover, the manner in which Christopher tells the police officer about the death of his mother and his grandparents, and describes his only living grandparent as not recognising him, shows that Christopher deals in facts and does not appear distressed by issues that would typically be upsetting, such as death and being unrecognisable to a close relative. This example usefully demonstrates both external and internal deviation. For Christopher's character, this way of behaving is entirely internally consistent with what is normal for him. However, for typical participants, Christopher's behaviour deviates from external pragmatic norms of attributing intentions to interlocutors and communicating via the Cooperative Principle.

<H3>Orthography</H3>

Orthography refers to spelling conventions. Consider the following extract:

<EXT>

The sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling. Ah wis jist sitting thair,
focusing oan the telly, trying no tae notice the cunt. He wis bringing me doon.

<SRC>(Welsh 1993: 3)</SRC>

</EXT>

This example is the first line of *Trainspotting*, a novel by Irvine Welsh. The novel is set in Edinburgh and in this extract, Renton, the main character and first-person narrator, is describing his friend Sick Boy. Both Sick Boy and Renton are users of heroin. Throughout the novel, Welsh uses non-standard orthography to present Renton's thought and speech. The effect of this is to suggest a regional pronunciation, which we assume to be the Edinburgh vernacular used by Renton. Foregrounding Renton's way of speaking in this way aids characterisation as it emphasises something that would typically go unsaid. Some stylisticians might consider this example to constitute phonological deviation, since it is concerned with pronunciation. We argue that it is ultimately how the text is experienced that determines how we should characterise the type of deviation. If the text is read aloud then the reader will experience phonological deviation; if the text is read silently then the reader will experience orthographic deviation.

<H3>Phonology</H3>

The issue of how the term *phonology* is often used in stylistics is worth commenting on here. Unlike the technical meaning of phonology in linguistics more broadly, in stylistics the term tends to be used to describe sound in a more specific sense (see, for example, Short's 1996 use of the term to encompass rhyme schemes, assonance, alliteration and consonance). In line with the argument we made in relation to orthography, we argue that the extract below is concerned with the phonological level of language, as it is intended to be performed.

<EXT>

I'll tell you now and I'll tell you firmly
I don't never want to go to Burnley
What they do there don't concern me
Why would anybody make the journey?

[...]

I'll tell you now and I'll tell you briefly
I don't never want to go to Keighley
I'll tell you now, just like I told Elsa Lanchester...
I don't ever want to go to... Cumbernauld

<SRC>(Cooper Clarke, no date)</SRC>

</EXT>

Above is the first and last stanza of 'Burnley' a poem performed by the spoken word 'punk' poet, John Cooper Clarke. Cooper Clarke was born in the city of Salford in the North of England, close to the city of Manchester. When performing, Cooper Clarke recites his poetry in his native Salford accent. In each of the four stanzas of the poem, Cooper Clarke introduces new locations around the North of England and describes why he does not wish to visit them.

Each stanza has four lines and each of the four lines share the same rhyme; i.e. each line ends on the [I] phoneme. Furthermore, each of the lines in the poem features between seven and 11 syllables, which sets up a rhythm for reciting it. Moreover, the repetition of the rhyme suggests that the listener can expect this rhyme pattern (AAAA, AAAA etc.) for the rest of the poem. This phonological parallelism is only deviated from in the last stanza, when the last phoneme in the penultimate line is not [I], but [ə]. It is also in this line that the first indication that the rhyme scheme may change comes, as it features more syllables than the lines that have come before it. By doing this, Cooper Clarke deviates from an internal phonological norm and as a result foregrounds the last sound in the penultimate word

'Lanchester'. Despite the change in rhyme, the listener expects the next line to rhyme with 'Lanchester' and when this does not, it has a foregrounding effect as it preserves neither the rhyme scheme nor the phonological patterns set up in the poem generally; clearly, most listeners will expect 'Manchester'. Furthermore, as well as being foregrounded phonologically, Cumbernauld is also marked against the towns Cooper Clarke has previously mentioned as it is not a Northern English town, but a town in Scotland. The effect of the foregrounding is comedic, partly because Manchester is a much more well-known place than the towns mentioned earlier in the poem. The humour is likely to be heightened if listeners have the contextual knowledge that Salford (Cooper Clarke's home town) is often seen as secondary in importance to the neighbouring city of Manchester; in effect, by playing with listeners' expectations, Cooper Clarke is able to reduce Manchester's importance for a change.

<H3>Syntax and morphology</H3>

Below is an extract from *The BFG*, a children's story written by Roald Dahl. In the story, the BFG (or Big Friendly Giant) takes Sophie from the orphanage where she lives after she sees him blowing dreams into children's bedrooms. In the extract, Sophie does not know that the giant is friendly and begs him not to eat her:

<EXT>

The Giant let out a bellow of laughter. 'Just because I is a giant, you think I is a man-gobbling cannybull!' he shouted. 'You is about right! Giants is all cannybully and murderful!'

<SRC>(Dahl 1984 [1982]: 25)</SRC>

</EXT>

This example is rich in linguistic deviation. As well as being a prime exemplar of morphological deviation, it deviates on the syntactic level ('I is a giant') and the semantic level ('cannybully'). The BFG is incredulous that Sophie could think that he would eat her and explains how he is different from other giants, describing them as 'murderful'. This non-standard adjective is

formed by combining a free morpheme, 'murder' with the derivational suffix '-ful' to increase the intensity of the root (the neologism suggests that giants are full of murder).

Dahl's decision to have the BFG frequently use neologisms aids the characterisation of him as someone who is isolated from the 'human bean' world and therefore not fluent in standard English, instead having to rely on his ability to combine words and morphemes in unusual ways, in order to speak to Sophie. The use of nonsense words and morphological deviation also works as a minor plot device, allowing Sophie to correct the BFG's use of English, thereby adding an educational dimension to the story. Moreover, the BFG's foregrounded neologisms, which often feature non-standard morphology, foregrounds the process of language learning, making it both memorable and fun for children.

Graphology

Graphology is the level of language concerned with how a written text looks and how the choices made about features of the layout or design contribute to the composite meaning of a text. The example below is a poster from the 'We Listen' campaign launched by the Samaritans (a UK charity supporting people in emotional distress) and Network Rail to advertise and raise awareness of the work of the Samaritans:

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 22.1: The Samaritans: We Listen, 2016

The poster features a triadic layout of text, image and logo. One of the features of the poster likely to catch the eye is the deviant stance of the subject who is facing away from the viewer, preventing the viewer from being able to read his facial expression, something which is vital in human interaction. (Typically in advertisements, the subject maintains the gaze (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) of the viewer in order to create [or assume] a closer relationship between them and the service or product being depicted in the advertisement). This external graphological deviation foregrounds the stance of the subject and pushes the viewer to interpret the significance of this design choice. As is normative in advertisements that feature

a subject, the text element of the poster is written in the first person, which has the effect of attributing a voice to the subject in the image by suggesting that it is he who is declaring that he is going to be alright and is fine spending a lot of time alone. The text above the image of the subject deviates from an internal norm in that the darker coloured font is foregrounded against the lighter coloured font. Through this deviation, two voices are created for the subject which suggests that there is a conflict between what the subject is saying and what the subject is actually feeling. By doing this, the Samaritans foreground the social stigma around admitting loneliness and the issue of males in particular as a high risk group that are not accessing services like the Samaritans due to this stigma. This interpretation of the text is also supported by having the subject look away from the viewer, which is suggestive of him hiding his feelings by physically turning away from help.

The duality of voice created by the change in font colour is also present in the text underneath the image of the subject. In this instance, however, the voices are not attributed to the subject, but instead to the viewer and the Samaritans as an institution. This is indicated by the second-person pronoun 'you', which addresses anyone viewing the poster, and the first-person plural pronoun 'we'. The use of two font colours here also sets up the words 'hear' and 'listen' as being in opposition to each other and suggests that when others merely hear, the Samaritans listen. The use of colour is also graphologically parallel with the text at the top of the advert; the 'we listen' clause is the same colour as the implied propositional content 'I'm so alone'. This parallelism pushes the viewer to see these two elements of the poster as connected, suggesting that, by listening, the Samaritans are able to hear the implied meaning behind their callers' words.

<H2>2.3 Experimental work on foregrounding</H2>

Section 2.3 demonstrated the application of foregrounding theory analytically. But do readers really notice and attach significance to particular linguistic choices? The answer, based on experimental work that has tested the psychological reality of foregrounding, is a clear yes.

This important experimental work was initiated by [van Peer \(1986\)](#) in a groundbreaking book which is an attempt to validate foregrounding theory by experiment rather than through the simple discussion of examples. In brief, [van Peer \(1986\)](#) began by analysing a series of texts, identifying the deviation, parallelism and resultant foregrounding in them. He then asked 153 participants to mark what they took to be particularly noticeable elements in the texts. Van Peer found that these participants identified the same textual elements as he himself had done, thereby establishing that readers' attention is attracted by foregrounding. Van Peer's participants also claimed that passages containing high degrees of foregrounding were more significant and worthy of discussion (validating [Leech's 1969](#) claim for the importance of what he termed congruence of foregrounding). Moreover, van Peer's findings were statistically significant, meaning that the results were generalisable beyond the particular sample of participants studied. [Van Peer's \(1986\)](#) study was therefore able to establish both the affective value of foregrounding and the predictive power of foregrounding theory. Subsequent experimental work has built on these initial findings. Miall and Kuiken (1994), for example, were able to replicate [van Peer's \(1986\)](#) findings and show that participants read textual passages that contained foregrounding more slowly. Hakemulder's (2004) study provided similar support for [van Peer \(1986\)](#). Other studies have concentrated on specific aspects of foregrounding. For example, [Emmott et al. \(2006\)](#) have demonstrated the foregrounding potential of sentence fragments (e.g. incomplete sentences in the form of short noun phrases), showing through experiment that depth of processing is increased when readers' attention is caught by such fragments.

Experimental work on foregrounding has not been confined to literary texts, however. As stylistics has diversified into the study of texts of all types (consider our analysis of the Samaritans advert in the previous section), so too has experimental work. [Hakemulder \(2007\)](#), for example, has investigated the issue of foregrounding in film. In many respects this is a natural step for stylistics given that one of its founders, Viktor Shklovsky, was a noted

screenwriter and critic and close compatriot of the early Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein. Indeed, the influence of Shklovsky's Russian Formalist approach can still be seen in the work of contemporary film critics such as David Bordwell (see, for instance, [Bordwell et al. 2016](#)).

[Hakemulder's \(2007\)](#) study was designed to replicate van Peer's findings concerning the effects of foregrounding. In addition, Hakemulder aimed to test the background/foreground hypothesis; that is, the notion that to perceive foregrounded elements, readers/viewers must be aware of normal conventions. (The background/foreground distinction is also a prime concern for cognitive stylisticians and maps on to their concepts of figure and ground; see section 2.4 for more details on this). To test whether perceptions of foregrounding were enhanced by recognition of a background, Hakemulder enlisted 65 participants, with a mean age of 19–26 (Standard Deviation = 1.89), and divided them randomly into two groups. The first group was shown a scene from the 1953 film *Moulin Rouge*. The scene in question takes place in a restaurant and in cinematic terms is a conventional portrayal. Participants were then asked to describe what they had seen and indicate what they found most striking about the scene. Participants were then shown a second restaurant scene, this time from the 1983 film *E la nave va*, and asked the same questions. The scene from *E la nave va* was chosen for its unusual filmic techniques: in the section that takes place in the restaurant kitchen, fast motion is used, whereas when the waiters enter the dining room, slow motion is employed to reflect the change of pace from the frenetic atmosphere of the kitchen.

The second group followed the same procedure, except that rather than viewing the scene from *Moulin Rouge* prior to watching the scene from *E la nave va*, they were instead shown a scene from the 1985 film *Witness*. This scene is of a shooting in an underground car park.

[Hakemulder's \(2007\)](#) hypothesis was that Group 1, having been made more aware of the

conventional representation of a restaurant than Group 2, would be likely to perceive a greater degree of foregrounding in the unusual restaurant scene.

Participants were asked to compare the scenes they had watched in terms of the degree to which they found them striking, beautiful, interesting, poetic, surprising, artful and attention-grabbing. Group 1 (the experimental group) considered scene 2 (*E la nave va*) to be more striking, beautiful, interesting, surprising, artful and attention-grabbing than scene 1 (*Moulin Rouge*). There was no significant difference between scenes for the 'poetic' variable. Group 2 (the Control Group) considered scene 2 to be more striking, beautiful, poetic, surprising and artful than scene 1 (*Witness*). There was no significant difference between scenes for the 'attention-grabbing' and 'interesting' variables. There is, then, some support in these results for the background/foreground hypothesis. Group 1 found scene 2 to be more interesting and attention-grabbing than did Group 2. [Hakemulder's \(2007\)](#) results also demonstrate that foregrounding can be perceived in film, just as it is in writing.

Experimental work continues in stylistics and some of the most interesting recent research has aimed to test cognitive stylistic accounts of how readers engage with narrative. For instance, [Sanford and Emmott's \(2012\)](#) groundbreaking book *Mind, Brain and Narrative*, provides neuroscientific evidence for a range of phenomena related to foregrounding. In the next section, we outline how the cognitive stylisticians whose work is currently being tested have engaged with the concept of foregrounding.

<H2>2.4 Cognition</H2>

Much contemporary stylistics is informed by insights from cognitive linguistics concerning the processing of language (key work in this area includes [Emmott 1997](#); [Stockwell 2002](#); [Burke 2011](#)). Given that stylistics aims at 'relating linguistic facts (linguistic description) to meaning (interpretation) in as explicit a way as possible' ([Short 1996](#): 5), the value of cognitive stylistics (or cognitive poetics as it is sometimes known) is that it offers a principled framework within which to hypothesise about how interpretation is likely to stem from textual choices. Cognitive

stylistics (if practised well) does not dispense with the linguistic element of stylistics. Rather, it brings together two endeavours: (i) description of the stylistic characteristics of a text using linguistic theories, models and methods, and (ii) assessment of the interpretative significance of these using theories and models from cognitive linguistics (and, sometimes, from cognitive science more generally).

The particular value of cognitive approaches for our understanding of foregrounding stems from an ambiguity in the term. Emmott and Alexander (2014: 330) explain that foregrounding 'can apply either to the linguistic devices used to create prominence or to the effect of bringing parts of a mental representation to the forefront of attention'. In 2.2 we focused on the linguistic triggers of foregrounding but it is insights from cognitively-oriented work that allow us to explain how such devices prompt attention. Key to explaining this is the concept of figure and ground, which originates in the work of the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin.

Rubin's (1915) work on visual perception proposed that we make a distinction between what he termed figures and the background against which they are made prominent. In visual terms, figures have form (as opposed to the formlessness of the ground), and may be brighter, larger or more colourful than the ground. Figures attract our attention and, as a result, we assume they are meaningful in a way that the ground isn't. This saves cognitive effort; we do not need to process the whole of an image to the same degree that we process figures. As West (2011: 242) explains, when you read a book you focus on the marks on the page (i.e. the words) rather than the white spaces around them. As a result of figure/ground segregation (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: 157), the illusion is created that the black words are *on* the white page, as opposed to the reality of the page being a combination of black and white shapes.

Ungerer and Schmid (1996: 160) explain that locative relations (e.g. up, down, in, out, over, under, next to, behind, in front of, etc.) are an important aspect of figure/ground segregation. And a key explanatory concept for understanding the cognitive processing of locative relations is the image schema. Image schemas are basic cognitive structures derived from our everyday

experiences. We use them to understand and make sense of the world around us. OVER, for instance, is an example of an image schema that distils our experience of a particular relationship between objects, where one is the trajector and the other is the landmark. *Trajector* and *landmark* are terms used when figure and ground exist in a locative relationship to each other. The trajector in an OVER image schema is the element that moves above the landmark; that is, it is figural against the ground of the landmark. In stylistic analysis, image schemas can be drawn on to hypothesise about how we make interpretative sense of particular stylistic choices. Consider the following striking image from Lisa Klaussmann's novel *Tigers in Red Weather*:

<EXT>

The oak tree in the backyard cut pieces from the moon[.]

<SRC>(Klaussmann 2012: 4)</SRC>

</EXT>

In linguistic terms, this sentence is foregrounded. Oak trees have neither volition nor dexterity, so it is semantically deviant for the noun phrase 'The oak tree' to form the subject of the dynamic verb 'cut'. Combined with our schematic knowledge which renders impossible the idea that the moon might have pieces literally cut from it by a tree, this forces us to interpret the sentence as metaphorical. Our IN FRONT OF image schema enables us to make sense of the description. The moon is a landmark partially covered by the trajector that is the oak tree; and the tree's branches moving in front of the moon give the impression that parts of the moon have been cut away (rather like black ink cuts away the whiteness of a page in West's 2011 example). However, the proposition conveyed by the syntactic structure of the sentence contradicts the cognitive structure stored in our IN FRONT OF image schema, thereby disrupting the image schema by forcing us to reconceptualise the relationship between trajectory and landmark. The foregrounding effect of the semantic deviation is that it makes us focus attention on the landmark (the moon) rather than the trajector, which gives

rise to a defamiliarising effect (just as if we were to try to focus on the page rather than the writing on it).

<H2>2.5 Corpora</H2>

Alongside developments in cognitive stylistics, one of the most significant advances of recent years has been the use of corpora and corpus linguistic analytical techniques to support stylistics. Corpora can be large-scale, such as the Global Web-based English (GloWbE) corpus of 1.9 billion words of written language (see <http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe/>), or they can be smaller-scale, such as the West Yorkshire Regional English Database (WYRED) of Northern British English speech currently being developed at the University of Huddersfield to support forensic phonetic analysis (see [Gold et al. forthcoming](#)). Corpus methods have revolutionised stylistics because they offer a means of identifying the statistical significance of foregrounded features of language. They do this by providing a means of determining the norms against which foregrounded features are figural. In effect, corpora offer a way of identifying both figure and ground in language. This is an important development as [Mukařovský's \(1964 \[1932\]\)](#) concept of foregrounding depends on the notion of what he calls the 'standard language' (i.e. linguistic norms) against which foregrounded features are prominent. However, until the advent of electronic corpora, determining what these norms were was remarkably difficult to do with any degree of confidence. Moreover, some linguists doubted the value of frequency information at all. [Freeman \(1970: 3\)](#), for instance, states that 'even if [frequencies] could be ascertained they would constitute no real insight into either natural language or style'. Corpus stylistic studies have conclusively shown this not to be the case and, consequently, Freeman's view no longer has credence within stylistics.

One area of stylistics in which quantitative information has been invaluable is the study of speech and thought presentation. In their groundbreaking book *Style in Fiction*, [Leech and Short \(1981: 324\)](#) introduce what they term a 'cline of interference' with regard to the options for presenting character talk in fiction. At one end of the cline are categories that purport

faithfulness to a perceived original utterance. The most obvious of these is direct speech (or thought), where the exact words of the character in question are reported in inverted commas; e.g. *'Who the hell are you?'* asked a very military voice. (Le Carré 1974: 7). At the opposite end of the scale is very minimal presentation, where all we know is that speech (or thought) took place, as in *The two young men spoke for a long time, one into the ear of the other.* (Gorriti 2003: 65). Leech and Short (1981: 334) point out that in fiction direct speech is the norm for speech presentation, whereas indirect rather than direct thought is the norm for thought presentation (e.g. *He thought that they had established some kind of mutual respect* [.] [de Bernières 1994: 196]). This is on the grounds that thoughts are not formulated verbally and so cannot be reported word for word. Semino and Short's (2004) corpus-based study of speech, writing and thought presentation in a 250,000 word corpus of English writing (fiction, news and biography) offers a means of testing these proposed norms. Semino and Short's corpus was manually annotated to identify all the speech, writing and thought presentation techniques present in the data. This allowed for the calculation of frequency information for each category. While they found that direct speech was indeed the quantitative norm for speech presentation, free indirect thought (FIT) rather than indirect thought was the quantitative norm for thought presentation (FIT mixes features of narration with features of direct presentational forms; Leech and Short (1981: 25) use the example *He would return there to see her again the following day*). Semino and Short (2004) point out that one reason for this apparent overuse of FIT in the corpus is the opportunities it affords for dramatising thoughts in a way that avoids the artifice of presenting thought directly. Support for this comes from the fact that in their corpus, while FIT was the most frequent thought presentation category in the corpus generally, it was only in the fiction section that it dominated.

In a later study, McIntyre and Walker (2011) built a corpus of Early Modern English writing (fiction and news) and annotated it for speech, writing and thought presentation using Semino

and Short's (2004) categorisation system. What they found was that, in contrast to Semino and Short's 20th-century data, *indirect* thought was the quantitative norm in the Early Modern period, with FIT only emerging much later in the period. The value of these particular corpus-based projects is that they offer an insight into how norms shift across time with regard to the presentation of speech, writing and thought. This increases our ability to judge what counts as deviant usage in particular periods. McIntyre and Walker (2011) also suggest that their results are indicative of how genre styles develop over time. In more general terms, the use of corpora in stylistics enables the testing of ideas originally developed without recourse to empirical data.

Corpus stylistics, however, is not limited simply to quantifying norms. Corpora can also be used to test intuitions about particular interpretations. And the issue of interpretation applies equally to everyday discourse as it does to literary texts. The following example is text taken from a tweet that went viral with over 35,000 Twitter 'likes' at the time of writing. It is often some level of foregrounding that causes such posts to go viral, as can be seen here :

<EXT>

People who are offended when I breastfeed in public need to STFU. What I'm doing is
natural and strengthens the bond between me and my dog.

</EXT>

The first sentence of this tweet invokes a societal argument about breastfeeding (i.e. that people exist who are offended about others breastfeeding in public) and then plays on this in the second sentence. The foregrounding arises because of a collocational clash; the final noun phrase 'my dog' contradicts our schematic expectations of who or what is breastfed as well as how the bond between a dog and its owner is usually 'strengthened'. The foregrounding that occurs here is as a result of external semantic deviation from collocational norms. Corpus analysis demonstrates this. In the British National Corpus, for instance, which comprises 100 million words of British English, the only statistically significant noun collocates of

'breastfeeding' are 'counsellor', 'pregnancy', 'baby', 'child' and 'women'. 'Dog', unsurprisingly, is nowhere to be seen. Corpus data, in this case, provides evidence of collocational behaviour that allows us to determine the norms against which the semantic foregrounding is made prominent.

Corpus stylistics continues to develop, with recent work exploring the potential for integrating cognitive analytical frameworks and corpus methods (see, for example, [Stockwell and Mahlberg's 2015](#) work on characterisation in Dickens, and [McIntyre's 2015](#) discussion of the integration of cognitive and corpus methods generally).

<H1>3. KEY AREAS OF DISPUTE AND DEBATE</H1>

Having outlined the fundamental concept of foregrounding, in this section we discuss two issues in particular that continue to be the cause of debate in stylistics. These are the distinction between literary and non-literary stylistics, and the notion of objectivity in stylistic analysis.

<H2>3.1 Literary and non-literary stylistics</H2>

Stylistics is often perceived to be the linguistic analysis of literature, not least because that is how many stylisticians describe it (see, for example, [Stockwell and Whiteley's \(2014: 1\)](#) claim that 'Stylistics is the proper study of literature'). However, while it may be true that many stylisticians concentrate exclusively on the analysis of literary texts, there is nothing about stylistic methods that prevent them being applied in the analysis of non-literary texts. Moreover, it is important that stylistics is recognised as being the study of style in both literary and non-literary texts, since early stylistic work that aimed to discern the linguistic properties of literature was quickly abandoned when it became apparent that no such formal distinction existed. To define stylistics exclusively as the linguistic analysis of literature is therefore not only misleading but counterproductive, since it fails to acknowledge one of the most important contributions that stylistics has made to our understanding of the nature of literature itself; namely that there is no formal distinction between literary and non-literary

language. Contemporary claims that stylistics is the linguistic analysis of literature also overlook the long history of research within stylistics into style in non-literary texts, such as that by [Crystal and Davy \(1969\)](#), [Enkvist \(1973\)](#), [Short \(1988\)](#), [Carter \(2004\)](#), [McIntyre et al. \(2004\)](#), [Semino and Short \(2004\)](#), [Jeffries \(2010\)](#), [Browse \(2016\)](#) and many others.

A related issue is that the terms *literary* and *non-literary stylistics*, which are still commonly used by stylisticians, are confusing. They tend to be used to distinguish between the analysis of fiction and non-fiction (as we have done in the previous paragraph) rather than between the analysis of texts that are literary and those that are not. To this end, there is little need to use them, since the methods employed in the analysis of fiction and non-fiction are essentially the same. Added to this is the fact that literariness, as [Carter and Nash \(1983\)](#) have demonstrated, is a point on a cline. It is not determined solely by reference to linguistic features, nor is it a property exclusive to fictional texts. [Carter \(2004\)](#), for instance, has shown conclusively that the creativity often associated with literary writing is just as prevalent in everyday discourse (see also [Swann et al. 2011](#)). As he puts it, 'Creativity is not simply a property of exceptional people but an exceptional property of all people' ([Carter 2004](#): 13). There is, then, a compelling argument for abandoning the terms *literary* and *non-literary stylistics*, at least as they are currently used.

<H2>3.2 Objectivity</H2>

Because many stylisticians (e.g. [Stockwell 2002](#), [Montoro 2012](#), [Gavins 2013](#)) are interested in the analysis of literary fiction, and because the approaches used in stylistics are often seen as anathema to non-linguistically inclined literary critics, stylisticians have tended to be unusually defensive in the way they explain their approaches. Nowhere is this seen more than in the ongoing debate about objectivity in stylistic analysis. Other areas of linguistics (and, indeed, the sciences and social sciences generally) do not regularly engage in protracted arguments about whether their methods are rigorous and replicable, probably because it should be obvious from the outcomes of analysis whether this is the case. Stylisticians, on the other

hand, are often drawn into debates about the nature of objectivity in relation to stylistic analysis. This is in part because of an attempt to persuade literary critics of the value of stylistics but also as a result of the attacks that have been made on stylistics over the years by critics whose views have been that literature is not susceptible to objective analysis. In defending their approach, stylisticians have been forced into defending the concept of objectivity itself.

Perhaps the earliest such discussion was that between the linguist Roger Fowler and the literary critic F. W. Bateson, whose debate (see [Fowler 1971](#)) about the merits of applying linguistic methods in the analysis of literature reached its nadir when the discussion was reduced to the level of personal insult, not to mention shocking sexism: Fowler asked Bateson whether he would 'allow' [sic] his sister to marry a linguist and Bateson replied that he would prefer not to have one in the family. Bateson's complaint was that literature is by its nature not amenable to objective analysis because responses to it are so subjective. Stylisticians reject this claim on the grounds that it dismisses the notion that it should ever be possible to investigate the nature of art and the human condition and make claims about these with any degree of certainty. If we take Bateson's position, then every reader's opinion is equally valid and any claims we choose to make about literature can never be proved right or wrong. In effect, this position repudiates the very notion of critical inquiry and at a stroke makes the practice of literary criticism redundant. In contrast to this view, stylisticians claim that literature is, like any other object of study, open to objective analysis. Furthermore, stylisticians reject the notion that anything goes when it comes to interpreting texts. Instead, they (and by definition we) would argue that there is a finite set of reasonable responses to a text. Moreover, any supposedly different readings of a text are likely to be minor variants of a relatively stable higher order interpretation (see [Short et al. 2011](#) for a discussion of this issue).

In a later debate, MacKay (1998), also a literary critic, went further than Bateson by taking issue with the concept of objectivity generally. On the grounds that objectivity is never fully achievable (as stylisticians freely admit; see, for example, Carter 1982), MacKay rejects the view that we should aim for objectivity at all in stylistic analysis. But if we reject objectivity then we are left with nothing but subjective intuition, the problems with which we have already described in the previous paragraph. MacKay overlooks this problem and instead, in response to Short's (MacKay 1996: 358) claim that no stylistic analysis is objective in the sense of being true for all time, complains:

<EXT>

I read this as meaning that an analysis can be objective but not in the particular sense 'that it is true for all time'. So in what sense are we to assume that an analysis is or can be objective? How long is its shelf-life? Five years? One year? Can such an analysis be true for a fortnight?

<SRC>(MacKay 1999: 61)</SRC>

</EXT>

The problem here is that MacKay fundamentally misunderstands the nature of objectivity. As Short and van Peer (1999: 272) point out, the only claims that are likely to be true for all time are analytically true statements, such as 'all triangles have three sides' (and it is possible to imagine circumstances in which even these might no longer hold). Given that this is the case, it makes little sense to ask how long a supposedly objective claim ought to hold for. The answer is, of course, until someone else is able to demonstrate that it is wrong.

The other aspect of being objective that can be difficult to grasp is the fact that it is not possible to be 100% objective. This is because there will always be variables that we are unable to control. This is a problem even in the natural sciences. In stylistics, our analyses might be affected by sociological parameters such as our schematic knowledge of the world or our cultural upbringing. This does not mean that we should abandon the idea of objective inquiry.

Rather, we need instead to identify potentially confounding variables and prevent these having a bearing on our results as far as is possible, for example through triangulation (see [Miller and Brewer 2003](#): 326). In stylistics, this might involve, say, using corpus stylistic methods to support the notion of what might constitute ground (that is, norms) in a cognitive stylistic account of figural elements in a text.

In their reply to [MacKay \(1999\)](#), [Short and van Peer \(1999\)](#) summarise the concept of objectivity as follows:

<EXT>

In trying to be objective, one tries to be (a) clear, detailed and open (so that one's position is unambiguous) and (b) ready to change one's mind if the evidence or a subsequent counter-argument demands it. This is why it makes sense to talk of trying to be objective, and trying to be more objective. Objectivity is not like a light-switch, having only two positions, on or off. It involves a complex of interrelated factors and, as a consequence, is more suitably measured on a sliding scale.

<SRC>([Short and van Peer 1999](#): 273)</SRC>

</EXT>

To this we would add that being clear and detailed necessitates being systematic in analytical terms. This means applying analytical frameworks rigorously and not ignoring inconvenient data or cherry-picking examples to suit a particular argument. There is nothing in this approach that is remotely controversial to linguists, or indeed to social scientists or natural scientists generally. It is perhaps because of stylistics' focus on literature, and the fact that these theoretical and methodological standards do not tend to apply in literary studies, that the debate about objectivity in stylistics has been such a long-running one (see [West 2008](#) and [McIntyre 2011](#) for most recent discussions of the argument).

<H1>4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS</H1>

What we hope to have shown in this chapter is that fundamental to stylistics is the notion of choice. Style, whether literary or non-literary, is dependent on this. And central to understanding the functional significance of choice is foregrounding theory. Despite the many significant advances in stylistics over the years, the concept of foregrounding remains at the heart of all stylistic analysis. Theories and models from linguistics remain key to describing how and why features of language are foregrounded. Advances in cognitive stylistics have provided principled mechanisms for explaining the functional significance of foregrounding to readers. And developments in corpus stylistics have provided methods for determining norms, calculating the statistical salience of foregrounded features and testing intuitions about texts. As stylistics moves forward, we envisage a number of possible developments. In recent years, the analysis of multimodal texts has become more prevalent. We saw above how experimental stylisticians such as [Hakemulder \(2007\)](#) have engaged with multimodality. Other stylisticians have begun to explore how paralinguistic and non-linguistic elements of texts combine with language to project meaning. [Forceville \(2011\)](#), for instance, has explored how meaning is constructed from both image and text when reading comic books. [Nørgaard's](#) work (summarised in [Nørgaard 2014](#)), by contrast, has investigated the meaning potential of the graphological and typographical form of language itself, paying attention to such issues as font and colour. [McIntyre \(2008\)](#), on the other hand, has developed an approach to the stylistic analysis of drama that aims to make the analysis of performance as systematic as the analysis of the dramatic text. One aim for the future would be to improve the replicability of such work by developing more reliable frameworks for multimodal analysis. As such work continues, we would also hope that stylisticians turn their attention to speech; there is no reason why stylistics should remain a text-based subject. Certainly, the analysis of dramatic performance is one which would benefit considerably from the insights of phonetics as well as pragmatic methods.

In more general terms, we would advocate that stylistics stop framing itself as the linguistic analysis of literature, and instead adopt a more general definition that sees it as the analysis of style and its functional significance in all discourse types. Constant justification of stylistics to non-linguistically oriented literary critics is one of the practices that has led to defensiveness with regard to methodological approaches. Shifting the focus of stylistics so that it is not exclusively about analysing literature would reduce the need to argue about the value of rigour and replicability; instead, this could be demonstrated simply through analytical practice.

<REFH>RELATED TOPICS</REFH>

Literature and the English language

The language of creative writing

Corpus linguistics: studying language as part of the digital humanities

<REFH>FURTHER READING</REFH>

Jeffries, L. and D. McIntyre (2010) *Stylistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An accessible postgraduate-level overview of literary and non-literary stylistics, covering key areas of the field from cognitive to corpus stylistics.

Leech, G. and M. Short (2007) *Style in Fiction*. 2nd edn. London: Longman. A seminal study of the language of fictional prose.

Nowottny, W. (1962) *The Language Poets Use*. London: The Athlone Press. One of the earliest textbooks in stylistics and still valuable to contemporary stylisticians.

Simpson, P. (2014) *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge. An undergraduate-level task-based introduction with lots of examples and exercises.

Sotirova, V. (ed.) (2015) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stylistics*. London: Bloomsbury. A handbook providing a broad-ranging overview of the field, including a historical perspective.

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