

Language, Ideology and Point of View

Paul Simpson



London and New York

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To my Dad, Bill Simpson,
for teaching me the art of fly fishing.

Language, Ideology and Point of View

This systematic introduction to the concept of point of view in language explores the ways in which point of view intersects with and is shaped by ideology. It specifically focuses on the way in which writers and speakers encode their beliefs, interests and biases in a wide range of different media, including narrative fiction, advertisements and newspaper reports. The book draws on an extensive array of linguistic theories and frameworks to account for this intriguing and elusive aspect of textual meaning. Each chapter, in addition to its central concern with the concept of point of view, provides a self-contained introduction to a particular topic in linguistics.

The book contains exercises and worked examples and provides students with a practical and workable package of analytic materials. This integrated programme of language-study and textual analysis will be of interest to students of linguistics, stylistics, English language, English as a foreign language, literature and communication studies.

Paul Simpson is a lecturer in the School of English at the Queen's University, Belfast where he teaches courses in English language, linguistics and stylistics. Among his publications in stylistics and related fields is the book *Language, Discourse and Literature*, which he co-edited with Ronald Carter.

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Ronald Carter is Professor of Modern English Language at the University of Nottingham and was National Co-ordinator of the 'Language in the National Curriculum' Project (LINC) from 1989 to 1992.

Series editor's introduction to the Interface series

There have been many books published this century which have been devoted to the interface of language and literary studies. This is the first series of books devoted to this area commissioned by a major international publisher; it is the first time a group of writers have addressed themselves to issues at the interface of language and literature; and it is the first time an international professional association has worked closely with a publisher to establish such a venture. It is the purpose of this general introduction to the series to outline some of the main guiding principles underlying the books in the series.

The first principle adopted is one of not foreclosing on the many possibilities for the integration of language and literature studies. There are many ways in which the study of language and literature can be combined and many different theoretical, practical and curricular objects to be realized. Obviously, a close relationship with the aims and methods of descriptive linguistics will play a prominent part, so readers will encounter some detailed analysis of language in places. In keeping with a goal of much work in this field, writers will try to make their analysis sufficiently replicable for other analysts to see how they have arrived at the interpretative decisions they have reached and to allow others to reproduce their methods on the same or on other texts. But linguistic science does not have a monopoly in methodology and description any more than linguists can have sole possession of insights into language and its workings. Some contributors to the series adopt quite rigorous linguistic procedures; others proceed less rigorously but no less revealingly. All are, however, united by a belief that detailed scrutiny of the role of language in literary texts can be mutually enriching to language and literary studies.

Series of books are usually written to an overall formula or design. In the case of the Interface series this was considered to be not entirely appropriate. This is for the reasons given above, but also because, as the first series of its kind, it would be wrong to suggest that there are formulaic modes by which integration can be achieved. The fact that all the books address themselves to the integration of language and literature in any case imparts a natural and organic unity to the series.

Thus, some of the books in this series will provide descriptive overviews, others will offer detailed case studies of a particular topic, others will involve single author studies, and some will be more pedagogically oriented.

This range of design and procedure means that a wide variety of audiences is envisaged for the series as a whole, though, of course, individual books are necessarily quite specifically targeted. The general level of exposition presumes quite advanced students of language and literature. Approximately, this level covers students of English language and literature (though not exclusively English) at senior high-school/upper sixth-form level to university students in their first or second year of study. Many of the books in the series are designed to be used by students. Some may serve as course books – these will normally contain exercises and suggestions for further work as well as glossaries and graded bibliographies which point the student towards further reading. Some books are also designed to be used by teachers for their own reading and updating, and to supplement courses; in some cases, specific questions of pedagogic theory, teaching procedure and methodology at the interface of language and literature are addressed.

From a pedagogic point of view it is the case in many parts of the world that students focus on literary texts, especially in the mother tongue, before undertaking any formal study of the language. With this fact in mind, contributors to the series have attempted to gloss all new technical terms and to assume on the part of their readers little or no previous knowledge of linguistics or formal language studies. They see no merit in not being detailed and explicit about what they describe in the linguistic properties of texts; but they recognize that formal language study can seem forbidding if it is not properly introduced.

A further characteristic of the series is that the authors engage in a direct relationship with their readers. The overall style of writing is informal and there is above all an attempt to lighten the usual style of academic discourse. In some cases this extends to the way in which notes and guidance for further work are presented. In all cases, the style adopted by authors is judged to be that most appropriate to the mediation of their chosen subject matter.

We now come to two major points of principle which underlie the conceptual scheme for the series. One is that the term 'literature' cannot be defined in isolation from an expression of ideology. In fact, no academic study, and certainly no description of the language of texts, can be neutral and objective, for the sociocultural positioning of the analyst will mean that the description is unavoidably political.

Contributors to the series recognize and, in so far as this accords with the aims of each book, attempt to explore the role of ideology at the interface of language and literature. Second, most writers also prefer the term 'literatures' to a singular notion of literature. Some replace 'literature' altogether with the neutral term 'text'. It is for this reason that readers will not find exclusive discussions of the literary language of canonical literary texts; instead the linguistic heterogeneity of literature and the permeation of many discourses with what is conventionally thought of as poetic or literary language will be a focus. This means that in places as much space can be devoted to examples of word play in jokes, newspaper editorials, advertisements, historical writing, or a popular thriller as to a sonnet by Shakespeare or a passage from Jane Austen. It is also important to stress how the term 'literature' itself is historically variable and how different social and cultural assumptions can condition what is regarded as literature. In this respect the role of linguistic and literary theory is vital. It is an aim of the series to be constantly alert to new developments in the description and theory of texts.

Finally, as series editor, I have to underline the partnership and co-operation of the whole enterprise of the Interface series and acknowledge the advice and assistance received at many stages from the PALA Committee and from Routledge. In turn, we are all fortunate to have the benefit of three associate editors with considerable collective depth of experience in this field in different parts of the world: Professor Roger Fowler, Professor Mary Louise Pratt, Professor Michael Halliday. In spite of their own individual orientations, I am sure that all concerned with the series would want to endorse the statement by Roman Jakobson made over twenty-five years ago but which is no less relevant today:

A linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unversant with linguistic methods, are equally flagrant anachronisms.

Paul Simpson's contribution to the Interface series is in an area which is central to literary criticism. It has long been an aim of literary criticism to account for point of view in fiction. *Language, Ideology and Point of View* provides precise and systematic frameworks for taking this account further with particular reference to the significance of linguistic choices in representation. At the same time, Dr Simpson does not describe these linguistic choices as if they were neutral; instead he relates language and point of view to the particular social, cultural and ideological positioning of the various narrative voices within a text.

xii *Series editor's introduction*

The whole study is enlightened and enlivened by comparison of the relationship between literary and non-literary texts, underlining how studies of literary language are always more revealing if they do not presume that all discourses are discontinuous but that they are part of the same linguistic, textual and ideological fabric.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledging all those whose ideas have helped shape this book was never going to be easy. The greatest peril posed by selective acknowledgement is not deciding whom to include, but trying to decide whom to leave out. So, to the many colleagues and friends whose work in stylistics, linguistics and literary theory has in some way influenced and shaped the material presented here, I would like to express my deepest gratitude. Without this background of high-quality research, this book could never have been written.

If selective I must be, then it is best to start at the beginning. I'd like to thank Ron Carter not only for commissioning the book for Routledge's *Interface* series, but for his continued support and loyalty over the years. Others whose suggestions have fed directly into this project are: Bill Nash, Emma Williams, Peter Stockwell, David Seed, Linda Williams, Margaret Polomska, and Jenny Potts. Less direct, though none the less invaluable, has been the work of co-members of the Poetics and Linguistics Association with whom I have liaised regularly for well over a decade now. A special mention must also be made of my colleagues in Venezuela who, in a series of workshops on stylistics, provided much appreciated feedback on many of the pedagogical implications of the book – feedback made all the more stimulating when offered against a backdrop infinitely more exotic than that of a British university campus in winter. For permission to use their advertising copy in chapter 5, I am also grateful to Newton's 'Herbal Remedies'.

The bulk of this book was written during my time as a lecturer at the University of Liverpool. From that institution, Cathy Rees and, especially, Barbara Smith deserve special credit for their word-processing wizardry. I'd also like to thank my Liverpool friends for their patience during the 'gestation' period of the project, particularly those at the Oxford pub who on more than one occasion had to stifle a yawn over a

xiv *Acknowledgements*

pint while being treated to exuberant resumé's of that day's progress on the book. And all this at a time when the threatened demise of a struggling Everton FC formed the real agenda for late evening debate!

My greatest debt of all, however, must go to Janice Hoadley, not only for her stoic support over the course of the book's development, but for her insightful critique of the manuscript itself. It was her sense of stylistic clarity which led to the substantial re-writing of a number of passages; her academic level-headedness which prompted the removal of much of the 'vitriol' from parts of the argument. And while the flaws that remain in the book are to be attributed entirely to the author, they would have numbered many more had it not been for her patience, incisiveness and clarity of thought.

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1 Introduction: analysing point of view in language

Saying what happened is an angle of saying – the angle of saying is what is important.

Seamus Heaney on *The South Bank Show*, ITV, 27 October 1991.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Mexican film director Alejandro Jodorowsky, perpetrator of cult classics like *El topo* and *Santa sangre*, tells a germane if characteristically grisly parable to explain his film technique. The parable is about a one-eyed, one-legged, hunch-backed king who commissions a portrait of himself from his court artist. Faced with the obvious dilemma, the artist, trying not to insult the king, decides to paint out any of the deformities which might cause offence. However, the king is appalled by the untruthfulness and inaccuracy of the portrait and, in a course of action consistent with the narrative genre, summarily sentences the artist to death. A second artist is commissioned who, aware of the fate of the first, decides that a straightforward, honest and accurate representation is the best tactic. Yet the grotesque realism of this portrait makes the king furious, and the predictable execution ensues. The third artist does not have an easy task: on the face of it, the two obvious strategies have been tried and both have resulted in death. After a great deal of thought, he decides to paint the king in the role of a huntsman. By getting him to strike the pose of drawing a bow and arrow, the artist is able to paint the king with one leg resting on a log, with one eye closed and with one shoulder raised above the other. This representation of the king ingeniously disguises the disfigurements which led to the demise of the second artist, while avoiding the fabrications which resulted in the demise of the first. The king is delighted, of course, with the 'likeness' and rewards the artist with

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time-honoured commodities like riches, residences and sexual partners. It is the technique of this third artist which, Jodorowsky claims, characterizes his own *œuvre*.

Transposed to the domain of language, the technique of the third artist will also be the primary concern of this book. The chapters which follow share the common aim of exploring the ways in which things are 'made to look' in language. They focus on language as representation, as a projection of positions and perspectives, as a way of communicating attitudes and assumptions. The elusive question of the 'truth' of what a text says is not an issue here; rather, it is the 'angle of telling' adopted in a text, whether this be an advertisement, a novel or a newspaper report. In short, this book is all about *point of view* in language.

Over the next five chapters, a package of linguistic materials will be developed to account for this aspect of textual meaning. A 'toolkit' will be assembled progressively throughout the book and will draw on an extensive range of research on the structures and functions of the English language. To this extent, the book can be regarded, first and foremost, as a book about language. It provides a broad-based programme of language-study, a programme for textual analysis that concentrates on the ways in which the resources of language are exploited in a variety of texts. Throughout the programme, theory and analysis will be united by the common theme of point of view in language.

Before we embark on this programme, however, we will need to locate the present study within the broader traditions of textual analysis from which it derives. A clearer picture of the theoretical background which informs it and the critical assumptions which underpin it will need to be provided. The following section addresses precisely this issue.

1.2 **STYLISTICS AND CRITICAL LINGUISTICS**

Two interrelated branches of linguistic enquiry which have flourished over the last two decades are *stylistics* and *critical linguistics*. Both disciplines are compatible theoretically in so far as their practitioners use linguistic analysis as a basis for their interpretations of texts. Indeed, this interrelationship has been consolidated further by the recent appearance of textbooks, monographs and collections of articles which bring together the interests and concerns of both disciplines under a single cover.¹

Stylistics, first of all, normally refers to the practice of using linguistics for the study of literature. Exponents of stylistics are quick to point out, however, that stylistic techniques can be applied to texts other than those included in the established literary canon. Indeed, a central axiom of much modern stylistic analysis is that there is no such thing as an exclusively 'literary language'. While literary communication may be privileged as a site for much experimentation and inventiveness in language, the same type of linguistic innovation can occur in many other discourse contexts. This axiom is what sets stylistics apart from more traditional literary-critical approaches which view 'literary language' as a special, ontologically stable language form which is the exclusive property of literary texts. Such approaches thus embrace a rigorous distinction between literary language and the more prosaic, ordinary language which characterizes everyday interaction. Thus, in the literary-critical tradition of F. R. Leavis and his followers, 'literary language' is simply what makes up literature and so if a text is to be regarded as a work of literature, then it must be, *ipso facto*, comprised of 'literary language'. A typical stylistic approach to this question would, by contrast, prefer to invoke the term 'literariness' to account for the linguistic innovation which often occurs in the context of literary communication, but recognizing also that 'literariness' is a property of many texts other than those conventionally designated by the label 'literature'.²

Of course, what also sets stylistics apart from other types of critical practice is its emphasis, first and foremost, on the *language* of the text. This does not invalidate those other approaches to textual analysis – indeed, many stylisticians have sought to enrich their linguistic analyses by importing ideas from psychoanalysis, structuralism and deconstruction. But what captures the essence of the stylistic method is the *primacy* which it assigns to language. A text is a linguistic construct and we process it as a linguistic construct before anything else. And, the argument runs, if there is to be any serious attempt to engage with the meaning of a particular text, then there must be some concomitant engagement with the language of that text.

Because of this reliance on the 'science' of linguistics, it is often assumed that stylistics claims to be a purely 'objective' method of textual analysis. The analyst stands by disinterestedly while the linguistic machine squeezes out of a text whatever meanings have been put there by the writer. Yet few stylisticians claim such objectivity. They prefer to recognize instead that all interpretations are in some sense context-bound and are contingent on the position of the analyst relative to the text. As Toolan suggests, stylistics offers a 'way' of