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.

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Language, Ideology and Point of View

Paul Simpson
To my Dad, Bill Simpson,
for teaching me the art of fly fishing.
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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 highschool/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 cooperation 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 unconversant 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. 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 pint while being treated to exuberant resumés 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.
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 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 reading, a way which is ‘a confessedly partial or oriented act of intervention, a reading which is strategic, as all readings necessarily are’ (1990:11). Where the benefit of linguistics does lie is in the way it offers an established metalanguage which can account systematically for what the analyst feels are significant features of language in a text. When employed in stylistic criticism, linguistic terms have standardized reference; they are not what Fowler calls ‘chameleon adaptations’ which are invoked to suit the needs of the critic (1986:3). Thus, terms like ‘modality’, ‘transitivity’ and ‘deixis’ all have commonly accepted designations. This terminological agreement contrasts markedly with a common literary-critical habit of using terms in a semi-technical, pseudo-descriptive fashion. One of the consequences of more traditional critical practices which employ no shared metalanguage is the tendency to conflate ill-defined grammatical terms with impressionistic value judgements. Here is an example of the type of critical ‘squish’ which I have in mind:

In the fabulous linguistics of the quatrain in question, ablaut is not morphological but moral, the soft fruit of forbearance shrivelling into its own pit.3
This type of explanation, where linguistic terms are merged with affective commentary, renders communication with other critics fortuitous.

The rigour which the use of linguistics brings to textual analysis has another pay-off. Literary texts offer an exciting testing ground for linguistic theories and constructs, often forming a path to clearer formalizations of linguistic knowledge. There is a kind of bivalent heuristic here: linguistic models offer a ‘way in’ to a text, while the text itself allows for a challenging application for those models. It is no surprise, then, that this potential for increased awareness of language structure and function has resulted in stylistics occupying an increasingly prominent place in both undergraduate English-language courses and English-language teaching courses. This increase in interest is also reflected by the publication of textbooks and manuals on language which incorporate substantial stylistics components.

The dependency of stylistics on linguistics means that as techniques in linguistics become more sophisticated, so stylistic models become enriched and revitalized. Stylisticians are thus continually re-assessing their methods in the light of new developments in linguistics. One topic of investigation in stylistics which has been subject to this type of progressive revision is the concept of point of view. In the context of narrative fiction, point of view refers generally to the psychological perspective through which a story is told. It encompasses the narrative framework which a writer employs, whether this be first person or third person, restricted perspective or omniscient perspective, and accounts for the basic viewing position which is adopted in a story. Narrative point of view is arguably the very essence of a story’s style, what gives it its ‘feel’ and ‘colour’. Justification for this stance will be provided shortly when, in chapter 2, clearer definitions along with a detailed review of stylistic approaches to point of view will be provided. Suffice it to say here, this book will offer a way of conceptualizing and exploring this important aspect of a text’s organization. In doing so, it will slot into the ongoing revisionary trend of modern stylistics by taking on board issues of current relevance in linguistics.

Critical linguistics, like stylistics, seeks to interpret texts on the basis of linguistic analysis. This tradition of analytic enquiry can be traced directly to the work carried out during the 1970s by Roger Fowler and his associates at the University of East Anglia. Since the publication towards the end of that decade of two volumes outlining the critical linguistic ‘manifesto’ (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979), there has been a steady output of research within the tradition. What characterizes this work, first of all, is the way in which it expands the horizons of stylistics by focussing on texts other than those regarded as literary. Media language has received particular scrutiny, although analyses have been conducted on discourse types as diverse as swimming-pool regulations (Fowler and Kress 1979a) and university guidelines on student enrolment (Fowler 1981:24–45). Despite the heterogeneity of the texts examined, the motivating principle behind these analyses is to explore the value
systems and sets of beliefs which reside in texts; to explore, in other words, ideology in language.

There is, unfortunately, a proliferation of definitions available for the term ideology, and many of these are contingent on the political framework favoured by the analyst. From a critical linguistic perspective, the term normally describes the ways in which what we say and think interacts with society. An ideology therefore derives from the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value-systems which are shared collectively by social groups. And when an ideology is the ideology of a particularly powerful social group, it is said to be dominant. Thus, dominant ideologies are mediated through powerful political and social institutions like the government, the law and the medical profession. Our perception of these institutions, moreover, will be shaped in part by the specific linguistic practices of the social groups who comprise them.

A central component of the critical linguistic creed is the conviction that language reproduces ideology. As an integrated form of social behaviour, language will be inevitably and inextricably tied up with the socio-political context in which it functions. Language is not used in a contextless vacuum; rather, it is used in a host of discourse contexts, contexts which are impregnated with the ideology of social systems and institutions. Because language operates within this social dimension it must, of necessity reflect, and some would argue, construct ideology.

The motivation for a critical linguistic analysis of language could be set out in the following way. First of all, dominant ideologies operate as a mechanism for maintaining asymmetrical power relations in society. As language can be used by powerful groups to re-inforce this dominant ideology, then language needs to be targeted as a specific site of struggle. Analysis for the sake of analysis is not sufficient; instead, the analyst makes a committed effort to engage with the discourse with a view to changing it. In other words, by highlighting insidious discursive practices in language, these practices themselves can be challenged. Nowhere has this ‘consciousness-raising’ element been more apparent than in the work on ‘nukespeak’ carried out in the 1980s (e.g. Chilton 1985). The avowed intent of this research was to expose the obfuscation and dissimulation which typified much of the political rhetoric on nuclear arms. Linguistic analysis became a means of clarifying the terms of the nuclear debate and foregrounding, particularly, the way in which dominant Western ideology masks the potential horror of nuclear confrontation.

The critical linguistic rationale outlined here raises a number of additional issues concerning the interrelationship of language and ideology. One of these is to do with the way in which dominant ideologies become ingrained in everyday discourse. They become rationalized as ‘common-sense’ assumptions about the way things are and the way things should be. A process of naturalization takes place, to the extent that people are often no longer aware of the hierarchies and systems which shape their social interaction. Fairclough offers the following useful illustration of one type of naturalization:
the conventions for a traditional type of consultation between doctors and patients embody ‘common sense’ assumptions which treat authority and hierarchy as natural—the doctor knows about medicine and the patient doesn’t; the doctor is in a position to determine how a health problem should be dealt with and the patient isn’t; it is right (and ‘natural’) that the doctor should make decisions and control the course of the consultation and of the treatment, and that the patient should comply and cooperate; and so on.

(1989:2)

Ideology, Fairclough goes on to argue, is embedded in the language used to structure this type of social encounter. By foregrounding the linguistic code employed in such contexts, analysts can ‘demystify’ and ‘denaturalize’ what normally passes us by as real-time participants in everyday interaction.

Another issue arising from the critical linguistic rationale concerns the apparent ‘pervasiveness’ of ideology. As no use of language is considered truly neutral, objective and value-free, then theoretically critical linguistic analysis may be performed on any form of discourse. This explains the proliferation of analyses of diverse texts taken from a variety of contexts. However, the analyses which result from this pancontextual search for ideology in language have been criticized for ‘going too far’, for seeing features of major ideological significance in inconsequential, prosaic discourse. Consider, for instance, Hodge and Kress’s deconstruction of the word ‘tinnie’, an Australian English term for a tin of beer:

Tins of beer, in spite of their phallic shape and association with male drinking and male solidarity, are classified with the ‘ie’ of implicitly feminine solidarity, as safe objects of male desire.

(1988:102)

It is not clear if the _ie_ of, say, _junkie_ would be expected to carry the same degree of feminine solidarity. Extrapolating from the theory of the phallus-shaped beer tin, one might also conclude that all cylindrical containers were so-shaped because of this male sexist conspiracy and not because they just happen to be a useful way of storing products. There are times, perhaps, when a tin of beer is only a tin of beer.

This short survey of stylistics and critical linguistics, although important as a theoretical backcloth and point of entry to the book, has none the less been a highly condensed and eclectic summary of numerous strands of research. Readers new to the area may be alarmed at the introduction in so short a space of a flurry of abstract terms like _naturalization, ideology_—even _point of view_ itself. Others may wonder what precisely constitute the ‘techniques in linguistics’ which underpin so much stylistic and critical linguistic enquiry. Well, fear not, because every concept introduced thus far will receive extensive explanation and illustration over the course of the book. As far as linguistic ‘techniques’ are
concerned, the book will offer a series of detailed linguistic models which may be productively used in textual provided through sample analyses, and we will be in a better position to assess the merits and limitations of the stylistic and critical linguistic method in the light of these analyses. Before we move on to a fuller definition of the concept of point of view, a few comments on the book’s layout should clarify further its structure, its aims and scope and the types of issues with which each chapter deals.

1.3 USING THIS BOOK

As the previous two sections indicated, this book sets out to deliver an integrated programme in stylistic and critical linguistic analysis. The ‘package’ offered is a general model for linguistic criticism. A common thread running through the entire book is, of course, the preoccupation with point of view in language, whether this be the ideological viewpoint adopted in a newspaper report or the more localized ‘psychological’ point of view exhibited by a work of narrative fiction. A guiding principle behind all of this is the premise that a particular style represents certain selections from a pool of available options in the linguistic system. By developing a particular style, a producer of a spoken or written text privileges certain readings, certain ways of seeing things, while suppressing or downplaying others. One of the tasks of an applied-linguistics programme of this sort is to provide a means of ‘seeing through language’, to adopt the subtly ambiguous title of Carter and Nash’s recent study (Carter and Nash 1990). The purpose, in other words, is to probe under the surface of language, to decode the stylistic choices which shape a text’s meaning. By examining the way things are ‘made to look’ in language we will be exploring the linguistic equivalent of the painting of Jodorowsky’s third artist.

In terms of structure, the book is organized broadly into two main blocks, representing stylistic and critical linguistic interests respectively. A bridge between the two blocks is provided in chapter 4, half way through the book as a whole. This is not meant to suggest, however, that the two halves are to be viewed independently from one another. On the contrary, the theoretical compatibility of the two approaches is illustrated throughout. Furthermore, there is considerable cross-fertilization between the two blocks, with linguistic models assembled in the stylistics section being re-applied later in the book to newspaper and advertising language. Moreover, the later chapters contain many illustrations of how the linguistic models developed there can be equally productively applied to some of the passages of narrative fiction which were examined much earlier. It is the different aims and outcomes of the stylistic and critical linguistic approaches which makes some degree of separation sensible.

I have tried to keep this book as practical, accessible and ‘userfriendly’ as possible. To this effect, every chapter offers an equal balance of theory, analysis and interpretation. Chapters 2–5 also contain sections which provide detailed