

## HUMOR and STYLISTICS - Simpson and Bousfield.

Stylistics is a tradition of research that explores literature using the models, methods and techniques of contemporary linguistics. The underpinning postulate of all stylistic research is that literature is creative expression in discourse, and by imputation, that frameworks in language and linguistics are pre-eminently well-suited to the exploration of both the compositional aspects of literature and the intersection between patterns of style and the ways in which readers interact with, and respond to, these patterns. Enabled by the whole panoply of methods in linguistics, a stylistic analysis can stretch from detailed investigation of, say, phonetic patterning in a single poem to a large scale, corpus-assisted exploration of an entire movement in literary history. There has of course been, since antiquity, much scholarly and philosophical interest in the latent power of patterns in style and language, from the classical Rhetoricians (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005), through the Russian Formalist movement and thence to the Prague School Structuralists (Cook 1994). Yet it was largely in the last three decades of the twentieth century, under the stimulus of new and ever more refined developments in linguistic theory and analysis, that the recognisably contemporary discipline of stylistics took shape. In these years, numerous academic publications appeared where the unifying principle was that primacy of place be assigned to the *language* of literature. Among these early outputs were general book-length treatments by Widdowson (1975), Cluysenaar (1976), Traugott and Pratt (1980), Carter (1982) and Fowler (1986), and this body of work was ably supplemented by more specific studies on, for example, poetry (Leech 1969; Verdonk 1993), prose (Leech and Short 1981; Toolan 1988) and drama (Burton 1980; Culpeper *et al* 1998).

While the focus of such analysis, as noted, is steadfastly on the creative expression of the system of language, stylistics has never sought to deny other approaches to understanding literature, and nor has it sought to over-emphasise the formal properties of a text at the expense of its social and cultural context of production. On the contrary, stylistic methods are frequently enriched and enabled by theories of discourse, culture and society. For instance, three well-established branches of contemporary stylistics are feminist stylistics, cognitive stylistics and discourse stylistics, all which have been sustained by insights from, respectively (and rather obviously), feminist theory (e.g. Mills 1995), cognitive psychology (e.g. Semino and Culpeper 2002) and discourse analysis (Carter and Simpson 1989). Furthermore, creativity and innovation in language-use have never been cast as the exclusive preserve of literary writing. Many forms of discourse, such as advertising, journalism, popular music or even casual conversation, often display a high degree of stylistic creativity, such that it would be wrong to view dexterity in language use as exclusive to canonical literature. Therefore, in the analyses which follow later, examples from literary discourse are situated against the wider backdrop of different genres and registers of language. In our specific case, verbal humor

and linguistic impoliteness, which form the core of our sample analysis, are tracked and interpreted through examples from literary, dramatic and so-called 'telecinematic' discourses.

A defining characteristic of the body of research that is commonly understood to be 'stylistic' is that its methods of analysis should be sufficiently transparent as to allow other stylisticians to verify them, either by testing them on the same text or by applying them beyond that text. Thus, the conclusions and interpretations reached are principled only if the pathway followed by the analysis is accessible and replicable. It is this aspect of stylistics that perhaps more than any other sets the discipline in counterpoint to approaches to literature where interpretation comes solely from impressionistic commentary or untested (or untestable) intuition. Unsurprisingly, this methodological standpoint has induced much interest, in stylistics, in the expression of verbal humor in literature. In the absence of robust justification within a framework of language and discourse, it is simply not enough for the critic-analyst to decree that a passage of writing is humorous; nor is it enough to reiterate a received wisdom about certain genres of writing being 'comic' or to assume that all readers will find aspects of the prose style of, say, Jane Austen or Laurence Sterne inherently funny. A stylistic perspective on verbal humor argues that while linguistic features of a text do not of themselves constitute a text's 'humor', an account of linguistic features nonetheless serves to ground the stylistic interpretation and explain why, for the analyst, certain types of humor are possible.

Two key theoretical principles underpin the stylistic approach to the analysis of humor. In line with many contributions to this handbook, the first principle is that that humor requires some form of stylistic incongruity. More narrowly, the incongruity can be engendered by any kind of stylistic twist in a pattern of language or any situation where there is a mismatch between what is asserted and what is meant. The second principle is that the incongruity can be situated in any layer of linguistic structure. That is to say, the humor mechanism can operate at any level of language and discourse, and, as we shall seek to demonstrate in our sample analyses, it can even play off one level off against another. A large part of the stylistic analysis of humor therefore involves identifying an incongruity in a text and pinpointing whereabouts in the language system it occurs. Of course, not all incongruities are funny or humorous, and some of the issues which this raises for stylistic analysis are explored later in this chapter (see also Attardo 2001).

Unsurprisingly, one of the most commonly used stylistic devices for creating humor in literary texts is the pun. As a form of word-play in which some feature of linguistic structure simultaneously combines two unrelated meanings, many puns cut across different levels of linguistic organisation such that their formal properties are quite variable. Clearly, the pun is an important part of the

stylistic arsenal of writers because it allows a controlled 'double meaning' to be located in what is in effect a chance connection between two elements of language. Punning in literary discourse is illustrated by the following lines from the fourth book of Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* ([1743], 1986: 2292):

Where Bentley late tempestuous went to sport  
In troubled waters, but now sleeps in port.

Although an isolated example from many possibilities in literary discourse, the couplet does illustrate well the basic principle of punning. The form *port* embraces two lexical items: both obvious, one refers to a harbour and the other an alcoholic beverage. In the context of Pope's couplet, Bentley (a boisterous Cambridge critic) is described through a nautical metaphor, as someone who has crossed turbulent seas to reach a tranquil safe-haven. Yet the second sense of 'port' makes for a disjunctive reading, which, suggesting a perhaps drunken sleep, tends to undercut comically the travails of Bentley. In other words, the double treading is projected by balancing two otherwise unrelated elements of linguistic structure. Staying with Alexander Pope, here is a line from the second Canto of *Rape of the Lock* ([1714], 1986: 2233) where the spirit Ariel seeks to protect the poem's 'heroine' Belinda. Threatened by the 'dire disaster' and 'black omens' that might challenge her otherwise impeccable appearance, she attempts to avoid any peril that might

. . . stain her honour, or her new brocade

Here the rhetorical device of *zeugma* is carried by a single governing verb that conjoins two nouns: one expressing a lofty ideal and the other, rather more prosaically, Belinda's new embroidered garment. This technique in *high burlesque*, where trivial subject matter is presented in an ornate or formalised style, is also at work, nearly three centuries later, in the opening lines of Michael Longley's poem 'Level Pegging':

After a whole day shore fishing off Allaran point  
And Tonkeera you brought back one mackerel  
Which I cooked with reverence and mustard sauce.

(Longley 2004: 30)

Again, the *zeugma* is expressed through the conjoining of introspective reflection on the one hand with the more worldly culinary accompaniment required for the lone mackerel. Discussing the semantics of coordinated noun phrases like these, Attardo invokes the concepts of 'script opposition' and the 'logic mechanism' to describe the way text processors process the incongruity of such constructions. Referring to simple, playful juxtapositions like 'strawberries and *zeitgeist*' or 'asparagus and the immortality of the soul', Attardo highlights the obvious incongruity derived from

the opposition between the left and right hand sides of the coordination, suggesting that the resolution works on the assumption that since the two NPs occur as members of a coordinating construction, it follows that they are equivalent and that therefore it should be acceptable to equate them (1997: 412).

There is one stylistic feature of verbal humor that in some respects subsumes both the rhetorical trope of zeugma and the technique in pastiche of high burlesque. This is the concept of *register humor* (Attardo 1994: 230-253; Alexander 1997: 190-192). Whereas a dialect is a variety defined according to the user of language, a register, by contrast, is a variety defined according to the *use* to which language is being put. In other words, a register is characterized by a fixed (and recognizable) pattern in vocabulary and grammar; a cookery recipe, a university essay in physics or a journalistic report of a sporting event are all distinguishable as registers because of the function these forms of discourse are required to carry out. Context, so most theories argue, is an important determinant of register, although this predictive aspect is more about likelihood or general tendencies than about absolutely fixed patterns in grammar and style. Where the humor mechanism comes into play is when, as Attardo points out (1994: 239), speakers subvert predictions about the appropriateness of certain registers in context, and the resulting mismatches lead to the type of incongruity we identified early on as being at the heart of humor. Simply put, specific subject matter requires specific terms, but there is great comic potential in the mixing of these levels, styles and registers (Alexander 1997: 191).

Simpson (2014: 110-116) examines register humor in a passage from Irvine Welsh's novel *Trainspotting* (1993). In this episode, the novel's first person narrator, Renton, finds himself in a Magistrate's court defending a charge of shoplifting, having stolen books to support his heroin addiction. Renton's utterances in front of the court are sullen and monosyllabic, and are couched in the low-status Edinburgh vernacular that permeates the bulk of the novel ('Sell fuckin books. Ma fuckin erse'). However, when the Magistrate facetiously challenges Renton on his seeming penchant for the philosopher Kierkegaard (the author of one of the stolen books), the defendant offers this astonishing riposte:

-- So you read Kierkegaard. Tell us about him, Mr Renton, the patronizing cunt sais.  
-- I'm interested in his concepts of subjectivity and truth, and particularly his ideas concerning choice; the notion that genuine choice is made out of doubt and uncertainty, and without recourse to the advice and experience of others. It could be argued, with some justification, that it's primarily a bourgeois, existential philosophy . . .

(Welsh 1993: 166)

Here, the switch in register, from a non-standard vernacular infused with swear words and taboo language to an eloquent academic disquisition on moral philosophy, could not be more stark. Yet this suddenly elevated turn of phrase does more than simply engender comic effect. For one thing, the Magistrate is taken aback by the erudition, such that Renton is later released; for another, this is a knowing authorial gesture to the reader that the novel's seemingly indolent and drug-addled narrator is a more formidable intellectual presence in the story than he first appears.

Other stylistic treatments of humor in literature have quite naturally focussed on parody and satire, forms that draw on a particular kind of irony for the design of their stylistic incongruity (Simpson 2003). In very basic terms, irony is situated in the space between what you say and what you mean, as embodied in an utterance like 'You're a fine friend!' when said to someone who has just let you down. Additionally, irony may be engendered by the echoing of other utterances and forms of discourse. So in an exchange like the following

- A: I'm really fed up with this washing up.  
B: *You're fed up!* Who do you think's been doing it all week?

the proposition about being 'fed up' is used in a non-ironic way by the first speaker, but in an ironic way by the second. In other words, the status of the proposition when echoed by speaker B lacks the sincerity of when it is used for the first time by speaker A.

This principle of 'ironic echo' is absolutely central to the concept of parody. Once echoed, a text becomes part of a new discourse context so it no longer has the interpretative status it once had in its original context of use. Parody can take any particular anterior text as its model, as well as importing more general characteristics of other genres of discourse, making parody, in Nash's words, a 'discourse of allusion' (Nash 1985: 74-99). For instance, Dorothy Parker's poem 'One Perfect Rose' (1923) opens with a knowingly parodic echo of the lyric love poem of the seventeenth or eighteenth century: 'A single flow'r he sent me, since we met'. The last of the poem's three quatrains, however, subverts this anachronistic pattern of vocabulary and syntax through its comical expression of an altogether more contemporaneous desire: 'Why is it no one ever sent me yet / One perfect limousine, do you suppose?'

The distinction between parody and satire is not an easy one to draw, but it is commonly assumed that satire has an aggressive or critical element that is not necessarily present in parody. One stylistic approach to satire (Simpson 2003: *passim*) has argued that satirical discourse, as well as having an echoic element, requires a further kind of ironic twist or distortion in its textual make-up. This additional distortion means that while parodies can remain affectionate to their source, satire can never be so. Consider, for example, Jonathan Swift's famous satirical piece 'A Modest Proposal'

(1729). Swift's text echoes the genre of the early eighteenth century pamphlet, and more narrowly the proliferation of pamphlets offering economic solutions to what was then perceived as the 'Irish problem'. The opening of the Proposal reviews various schemes and recommendations to alleviate poverty and starvation, but it is only after about nine hundred words of text that its mild-mannered speaker eventually details his 'proposal':

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection. I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout. (Swift [1729],1986: 2175-6)

While Swift's 'proposal' echoes ironically the convention of a particular genre of discourse, it simultaneously distorts this convention through its startling suggestion to alleviate the burden of overpopulation in Ireland by eating that country's children. In this sense, the satire is created through both an echo of another discourse and a stylistic distortion within its own internal composition. That said, a question remains as to genuinely how 'humorous' this particular brand of satire is, a point that will be taken up later.

As observed in the introductory part of this chapter, stylistic approaches to humor are not restricted by the type of linguistic framework employed or by the type of literary genre explored. All kinds of suitable models may be pressed into service depending on the type of literary text under scrutiny. For instance, Attardo draws on models in cognitive linguistics for his cognitive-stylistic analysis of humour-inducing strategies in prose fiction (Attardo 2002). Focussing on Oscar Wilde's *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1891), Attardo applies the General Theory of Verbal Humor to the short story, differentiating amongst other things between Wilde's use of *punch lines* and *jab lines*. While the former category indicates the occurrence of a humour device at the end of the text, the jab line signals a humorous occurrence anywhere else in the text. A punch line (underlined) closes the following quip from the story:

Do you believe in clubs for young men?  
Only when kindness fails.

Whereas the punch line inheres in a simple pun around the lexeme *club*, a rather more complex pattern of jab lines permeates the following excerpt from the story:

. . . at the end of the picture gallery stood the Princess Sophia of Carlsruhe, a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds, talking bad French at the top of her voice . . .

(after Attardo 2002: 235; emphasis in original)

Expanding on the underlined units in this fragment from Wilde's text, Attardo argues that the lexeme 'Princess' activates certain stereotypical predictions about the direction the story is likely to take. However, the incongruity is delivered through the non-stereotypically princess-like characteristics that follow (Attardo 2002: 235-6). And, of course, these jab lines include the coordinated noun phrases 'tiny back eyes' and 'wonderful emeralds', another illustration of the rhetorical trope of zeugma covered earlier.

There is a long and established tradition of stylistic research on the pragmatic characteristics of dialogue, whether that dialogue is realised in plays (Burton 1980, Culpeper *et al* 1998, Mandala 2007) or in film and television (Richardson 2010; Piazza 2011). In the sample analyses that follow, we intend to probe further issues around the interconnections between humor and dialogue. Although dramatic dialogue is a genre of discourse that has been consistently and much-favoured in stylistic research over the years, in spite of some notable exceptions, little of this work has focussed directly or systematically on humor. Furthermore, and echoing the position stated at the start of this chapter, creativity in language-use transcends literature such that the analysis of fictional dialogue, for instance, may be carried out both on literary texts or on the kinds of dialogue found in television and film. Selecting the pragmatics of impoliteness has its preferred model of analysis, the stylistic analysis that follows embraces forms of literary and non-literary discourse alike.

#### *Humor and Stylistics meet the Linguistics of Impoliteness.*

The concepts of humor and impoliteness when present in fiction, drama, and even real life, can be natural bedfellows. From the irascibly insulting Doctor House in *House MD*, and the creatively offensive character of Malcolm Tucker's spin doctor in *In The Thick Of It* and *In The Loop*, not forgetting Tyrion Lannister in *A Game Of Thrones* jocularly 'confessing' the sins of his early life, when first accused of treason and murder (see below); to the real-life, albeit edited portrayals of chef-chef interactions in *Boiling Point*, *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, and *Hell's Kitchen*; to Police-Public Encounters in *Motorway Life*, and *Raw Blues*, the sheer popularity of these shows indicate a sure attraction towards and fundamental appetite for the socially disruptive nature of what has been termed, in academic circles, as rudeness, aggression and impoliteness.

In each case, the appearance and production of situations representing the construction and communication of impoliteness essentially indicates a break from the norms of expectation either within the text world created (in fiction, and drama), or within real life. But then, the same is true of humour. The combination of both impoliteness and humour, therefore, can compound the effect. After all, one often crucial aspect of humour, is that of incongruity. Incongruent humour is that

which breaks the expected or schematic norms of everyday situations. Ranging from the ridiculousness of pratfalls and slapstick humour, to the sublime of cunning and wilful social transgressions wrapped up in the linguistic dexterity of an able character's verbal humor. The main point to be made here is that humour is similar, in the respect of social transgression, at least, to impoliteness. As Mills (2003) argues, impoliteness is a break from the norms of interactional expectation. So, too, is humour through the approach to the concept known as incongruity theory (see Attardo 2001, Vandaele 2002). Impoliteness, and the communication of linguistic offence is based on notions of power and, hence, on superiority (See Bousfield and Locher 2008); but then, so too, is humour's superiority theory (see Attardo 2001, Vandaele 2002). Finally impoliteness can be constructed and communicated as a means of socio-cognitive relief (see Bousfield 2008) from pressure, stress or other perceived tension; but again so too does humour have its relief theory (see Attardo 1994, Spencer 1864).

Within the remainder of this analytic section, therefore, we explore the historical perspectives of both 'verbal humour' and 'linguistic impoliteness', including how the two have recently come to be theorised together in the works of Culpeper (2005), Dynel (2016) and Toddington (2008). Next, we explore core issues and topics in the analysis of humour and impoliteness, exploring the role, and impact of what Lorenzo Dus (2009) calls the 'double articulation' effect of most TV mediated productions, which would include dramatic representations of impoliteness. We explore methodologies for analysis of humour and impoliteness, and provide a sample analysis. We explore new debates in both impoliteness theorising and humour studies, indicating new issues, new challenges, and new potential ways of illuminating stretches of discourse involving impoliteness and humour from contemporary linguistic perspectives. All this, however, raises the question of how the study of impoliteness, and the study of humour relate to stylistics.

As we argued, it is the role of the stylistician to show the mechanisms, and models behind the verbal humour, and, in this case, therefore, behind the *linguistic impoliteness* to show how the attempt at humour (or at impoliteness, or both) has been made. To this end, we now explore the models and theories of impoliteness.

In defining impoliteness we may turn to any of the following. Bousfield (2010) has argued that,

Impoliteness constitutes the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive face-threatening acts that are purposefully performed either:

- (i) unmitigated in contexts where mitigation (i.e. politeness) is required and/or
- (ii) with deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.



Furthermore, for impoliteness to be considered successful impoliteness, the intention of the speaker (or 'author') to 'offend' (threaten/damage face) must be understood by someone in a receiver role.

(Bousfield 2010: 112).

The lowest common denominator in the definitions of impoliteness is a (set of) behaviour(s) that is face-aggravating in a particular context (Locher and Bousfield 2008). Culpeper (2011: 23) suggests that impoliteness "...is a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organization, including, in particular, how one person's or group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered 'impolite' – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be". Culpeper's approach, here, is crucial for our analyses in examples [1] and [2] below.

Impoliteness, however, has been described, somewhat contentiously, as being 'parasitic' on politeness (Culpeper 1996). Culpeper's observation operates along multiple axes, two of which are pertinent here: impoliteness as a parasitic concept, and impoliteness as a parasitic model for analysis. In terms of impoliteness as a parasitic concept: Locher and Watts (2008) have argued that Politeness not Impoliteness (or "Rudeness" as they label the concept we, here, understand as "impoliteness"; see also Terkourafi 2008, though cf. Bousfield 2008, and Culpeper 2005, 2011) is the unmarked, or expected, default "norm" in and across human-human interactions, all other things being equal. Hence, as Mills (2003) argues, *impoliteness* is a transgression, or break from the schematically expected norms of politeness. Hence impoliteness is, as a human concept, parasitic on the "default" understanding and expectation of human-human interaction of politeness. In terms of impoliteness as a parasitic approach or model of analysis: Historically, the most prevalent and broadly applied models of impoliteness are those which are derived – parasitically - from the classic model of politeness espoused by Brown and Levinson (1987) which draws upon Goffman's notion of *face*.

The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he is taking during a particular contact.

(Goffman 1967: 5)

Brown and Levinson argue that every individual in a society has two aspects of Goffmanian face, being:

Positive face: An individual's desire to be liked and for his or her actions to be approved of.

Negative face: An individual's desire to be unimpeded in his or her actions.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 17-18)

They further argue that every communication between two or more individuals has the potential to impact upon, or threaten one (or, we can say, both) aspect of face. These, they (ibid) term as face-threatening acts (FTAs). These *threats* to face are unavoidable for, as Scollon and Scollon (2001) argue there can be no communication without face.

The key, therefore, contend Brown and Levinson (1987), is to find a form of words through which any FTA can be mitigated: the threat obviated, or reduced; the damage done, lessened or atoned for. This is done by choosing a form of words attending to one's interlocutors' face wants or needs. This can be done by using linguistic politeness which attends to either the hearer's (or receiver's) positive face needs (the desire to be approved of) or negative face needs (the desire to be unimpeded). For example thanking someone for a gift attends to the gift giver's positive face needs (to be approved of: for providing the gift); whereas apologising for accidentally knocking into someone ameliorates the threat to the offended person's negative face (the desire to be unimpeded: by being knocked around during the normal course of their movements of the day). As fiction, including prose and drama, exist primarily to comment on the human condition, and (re)present situations and settings in life in a foregrounded way; it stands to reason that characters which are human, or human-like can be expected (unless there are signals to the contrary within the text) to have the same identical, or similar face needs to humans in real-life – otherwise fictional characters' own inevitable struggles with life, society or the environment would have little meaning or resonance for us as consumers of literature beyond being an autonomous artefact or even mere abstract *object d'art*.

Where this becomes particularly relevant for us in our theses in this chapter is when characters engage in, are faced with, or respond to impoliteness. In almost direct contrast to politeness, impoliteness is where individuals, or, in the case of literary stylistics, characters engage in attacking or exacerbating the threats to the face(s) of others – as per the definitions provided above for impoliteness - rather than mitigating those threats to face, as in politeness.

An example of a character responding to threats to her own face, with intentional threats to her interlocutor's can be found in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* ([1813], 2003).

[1a] *In this scene Darcy has arrived to propose to Elizabeth Bennett (a main character through whom much of the third person narrative is focalised). This proposal of marriage is shortly after he has worked furiously to ensure his friend Charles Bingley does not marry Elizabeth's sister, Jane Bennett, adjudging – in his prejudice – that the Bennett family is 'beneath' that of Charles Bingley. Darcy is evidently agitated as he arrives as, it transpires, he is struggling to reconcile his love of Elizabeth with her relatively lower social status compared to his own. Despite her own emerging feelings, Elizabeth nurses a dislike of Darcy's haughty pride, and adherence to class-based distinctions. All this results in an incongruent proposal and response indeed:*

He sat down for a few moments, and then getting up, walked about the room. Elizabeth was surprised, but said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, he [Mr Darcy] came towards her in an agitated manner, and thus began,

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her immediately followed. He spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority -- of its being a degradation -- of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit.

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection, and though her intentions did not vary for an instant, she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger. She tried, however, to compose herself to answer him with patience, when he should have done. He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand. As he said this, she could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer.

Whilst Elizabeth's surprise, and Darcy's conflict within himself are readily evident, what is of particular note, here, is the fact that Darcy's speech after his admission of love, and incorporating his actual proposal, is represented as Indirect Speech (see Leech and Short 1981). The back-shifted tense, and the use of third person pronouns clearly indicates this to be the case here: *He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand.* As Leech and Short have argued (ibid) the use of indirect speech as well as the use of Narrator's Representation of Speech Act evident in *in spite of all his endeavours*, produces a distancing effect on the reader. As this is focalised through Elizabeth we may well take this to mean she is lost in her astonishment as depicted in the preceding paragraph. Equally though, the indirectness of the way Darcy's speech is presented represents the off-handed way in which he describes his inner conflict between love, and position. This adds to Elizabeth's, and our sense of affront at the threat to Elizabeth's positive face (desire to be approved of) when faced (Darcy's compliments aside) with his rather distant and off-handed comments regarding her social rank and class being inferior to his own. We argue that this adds to our sense of affront as our access to the narrative is focalised through Elizabeth, meaning we share her emotional origo. What we mean here is that, given the locus, or centre of the narrative chapter's point of view is told from Elizabeth's

perspective we share the temporal, spatial and, as we are experiencing the narrative with her, aspects of her emotional point of view. What she sees, hears and feels, we get a sense of, certainly more than that of any other character at this point in the narrative. Hence, when she has her aspects of face threatened, we can understand and appreciate it more keenly, precisely because we share her origo.

Indeed, it is this feeling of threat to positive face that leads Elizabeth to respond with her own, this time, intentional threats to Darcy's face in a way which the reader may find not only humorous, but given the reasons for her impolite response, cathartic; and of lending itself towards an understanding of the psychological release that impoliteness (and indeed humor) in certain circumstances can provide, as we see in the immediately following extract:

'[1b] This extract continues immediately after the above in [1a]:

He spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and when he ceased, the colour rose into her [Elizabeth's] cheeks, and she said,

"In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could feel gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot -- I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to any one. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and I hope will be of short duration. The feelings which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard, can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation."

Mr. Darcy, who was leaning against the mantle-piece with his eyes fixed on her face, seemed to catch her words with no less resentment than surprise. His complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure, and would not open his lips, till he believed himself to have attained it. The pause was to Elizabeth's feelings dreadful. At length, in a voice of forced calmness, he said,

"And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little endeavour at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance."

"I might as well enquire," replied she, "why, with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I have. Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?"

In the fifth paragraph of extract [1b] here, despite the very formal, structural properties of their words, the function of Elizabeth's criticisms of Mr Darcy is to clearly, via Direct Speech representation, present her withering face attack on him in retaliation for his own insults towards her. Her comments of *'why, with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I was uncivil?'* represent attacks to his positive face (his desire to be approved of) as she is clearly and intentionally reproving him for his earlier, off-handed and distant remarks. Further, her following comments, *"But I have other provocations. You know I have. Had not my own feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?"* further reprove him constituting another impolite-functioning positive face attack. This also clearly limits his negative face (his desire to be unimpeded) by clearly outlining, in a damaging way, he will not get what he desires, precisely because he has denied those desires. It is evident that her comments have hit home in [1c]:

[1c]

As she pronounced these words, Mr. Darcy changed colour; but the emotion was short, and he listened without attempting to interrupt her

His colour change appears to demonstrate not only has she attempted a face attack, she has succeeded in impoliteness given the definition we adopt, above. Indeed all in all these, and other instances within this extract of Elizabeth's skilful destruction of Darcy's aspects of face constitute a more global attack from which he ultimately withdraws, as evident in [1d]:

[1d]

And with these words he hastily left the room, and Elizabeth heard him the next moment open the front door and quit the house.

(Austen, Jane [1813] 2003 Volume 2, Chapter 11, pp. 154-155, 157).

Given Elizabeth's skilful handling of Darcy's off-handed offence when proposing to her, and given that we are clearly focalised *through* her – thereby sharing aspects of her spatial, temporal and emotional origo – we are likely to find her behaviour humorous, or at the very least psychologically satisfying (cf. relief theory mentioned above) at having seen her take him down a proverbial peg or two. It clearly marks her character out as well-rounded, fearless, controlled, and strong-minded.

Heady traits given the 18<sup>th</sup> century period, and the society depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the assumed role and nature of women within the same. This link between the communication and construction of impoliteness and of humor in characterisation is not limited to Austen's prose, nor even to fictional narrative. Note the following extract in which the character of Tyrion Lannister in the dramatic adaptation of *A Game Of Thrones* moves from just another point of view character, to main protagonist, purely through his skilful, and exceptionally humorous use of impolite language.

[2] TYRION LANNISTER a nobleman, born with dwarfism, has been captured and put on trial for the murder of Jon Arryn, and the attempted murder of Brandon Stark. Crimes for which he is entirely innocent (other members of House Lannister were guilty of the crimes for which Tyrion is on trial). He has spent an uncomfortable night in LYSSA ARRYN'S "sky cells" – cells with a sloping floor and only three walls – where the fourth wall should be there is only sky and a three hundred foot fall to the valley floor. Having woken up dangling over the edge of his sky cell, and fearing he will not survive another night TYRION has bribed MORD, the jailer to take him to LYSSA ARRYN, Lady of the Vale, and her sickly, overcoddled, weak-minded 10 year old son, ROBERT in order to apparently confess. TYRION claims he wishes to confess his crimes to the assembled LORDS and LADIES of the Vale – this is a calculated move of Tyrion's to escape his cell. The crimes to which he is confessing are not the ones his captors LYSSA ARRYN and CATELYN STARK, wife of Jon Arryn, and mother of Brandon Stark, respectively, were expecting to hear - much to the amusement of the LORDS and LADIES of the Vale (and the TV viewing audience), but much to the apparent offense of LYSSA and CATELYN.

1. LYSSA: You wish to confess your crimes?
2. TYRION: Yes, milady. I do, milady.
3. LYSSA: (to CATELYN) The skycells always break them. (To TYRION) Speak, Imp! And meet your gods as an honest man.
4. TYRION: Where do I begin? I'm a vile man. I confess it. My crimes and sins are beyond counting. I've lied and cheated, gambled and whored. I'm not particularly good at violence, but I am good at convincing others to do violence for me. You want specifics, I suppose? When I was seven I saw a maid, bathing in a river. I stole her robe. She was forced to return to the castle, naked and in tears. If I close my eyes, I can still see her tits bouncing...

*The assembled LORDS and LADIES of the Vale gasp collectively. Some smile and laugh. Lyssa Arryn looks around the court, unsure as to their response.*

5. TYRION: ... when I was 10 I stuffed my uncle's boots with goat shit. When confronted with my crime I blamed the squire. Poor boy was flogged. I escaped justice. When I was twelve, I milked my eel into a pot of turtle stew. I flogged the one-eyed snake, I skinned my sausage (TYRION is miming masturbatory motions with his hands) I made the bald man cry into the turtle stew. Which I do believe my sister ate. At least, I hope she did...

*There is growing laughter around the courtroom from the LORDS and LADIES of the Vale.*

6. TYRION: ... I once brought a jackass and a honeycomb into a brothel -
7. LYSSA: (Standing up suddenly) SILENCE!
8. ROBERT: (Leaning forward. To TYRION) What happened next?
9. LYSSA: What do you think you're doing?

10. TYRION:           *(puzzled)* Confessing my crimes!
11. CATELYN:       Lord Tyrion, you are accused of hiring a man to slay my son, Bran, in his bed. And of conspiring to murder my sister's husband, Lord Jon Arryn, The Hand of the King.
12. TYRION:       I'm very sorry, I don't know anything about all that.
13. LYSSA:         You've had your little joke. I trust you enjoyed it. Mord! Take him back to the dungeon. This time in a smaller cell, with a steeper floor!

[...]

(Espenson, Benioff and Weiss (2011). *A Golden Crown*, A Game of Thrones, Season 1, Episode 6)

This extract is replete with impoliteness. Some direct and evidently intentional, other parts indirect, and less evidently intentional at the level of character to character discourse. Despite Tyrion's apparent politeness in turn 2. Where he calls his social equal, "milady" this is a *give deference* positive politeness marker (Brown and Levinson 1987) one which, incidentally, Lyssa denies Tyrion in return. Indeed, we see explicit impoliteness begin from turn 3 with Lyssa's calling Tyrion, "Imp!".

This is a combination of the 'call the hearer names', and the 'use inappropriate identity markers'

linguistic output strategies for impoliteness (see Culpeper 1996), which, together, constitute a

positive face attack through an insulting reference to Tyrion's dwarfism. Within the same turn she

further communicates the impolite albeit implied *threat* (Culpeper 1996) to kill him with "and meet your gods as an honest man" This being an extreme threat to Tyrion's negative face as she is

intending to end and impose on his presumed desire to stay alive. So far, the impoliteness she

communicates, whilst evidence of power role assumptions she has as his judge and sole juror, is not

at this stage humorous. Tyrion's indirect face-attacks on Lyssa, and Catelyn, begin with his apparent

confessions in turn 4 onwards, and this is where the humor begins.

Tyrion's apparent self-face-damaging admission that he is a 'vile man' and his 'sins are beyond

counting' appear to damage his own sense of seeking approval (his own positive face) especially

when he admits to lying, cheating, gambling and whoring. However, the first specific "sin" he

confesses to, from when he was seven years of age, is little more than childlike mischief. His use of

the taboo word "tits", and the later "shit", is highly incongruent with that of either a noble of high

birth, or a genuine, remorseful confession. In fact, Tyrion's introduction of the lexical items, 'tits'

and 'goatshit' arguably comprise representations of register humor (see above) insofar as they

clearly do not belong in the confession of crimes by a nobleman of high birth and standing.

Furthermore, the use of this incongruent lexical token appears to be the trigger for at first

astonishment, and then some scattered laughter in the assembled court, but also apparent and

eventually evident rising offence that Lyssa takes. She takes this precisely as Culpeper 2011

predicted, given the use of such taboo and hence incongruent words, as their use is not how one

expects or thinks behaviour in a confession ought to be. Their use, whilst obviously incongruent, contribute to an undercurrent of power-challenge which Tyrion is so skilful at producing.

Continuing with his confession Tyrion's admission of having another person punished for his crime of putting goat's faeces in his uncle's footwear is followed by the incongruous and repeated (through elegant variation) admission that he masturbated into food (I milked my eel into a pot of turtle stew. I flogged the one-eyed snake, I skinned my sausage I made the bald man cry into the turtle stew) which his sister (whom he hates) then ate. There are multiple points to make here in support of the argument being made. First, the sheer repetition of his admission of masturbating, using different metaphors as a way of elegantly varying the point he is making is doubly foregrounded. The repetition of the propositional content is one aspect of foregrounding, which is, by definition, incongruent; and the use of such metaphors, when literal language would have sufficed, is yet another instance of foregrounding, and hence, again, incongruity. Indeed, the sheer confluence of foregrounding/incongruity in the self-effacing admission of 'guilt' contributes to the generation of humor for the text-world's audience and the TV viewing audience; as, indeed, does the fact that in turn 7, Lyssa shouts for Tyrion to stop – evidently offended by the confession taking a turn which she did not expect, or anticipate (remember her satisfying comment to her sister, Catelyn 'The sky cells always break them' at the start of the scene. This directive for Tyrion to 'STOP!' appears to show she has not anticipated his type of confession, and the incongruity therein challenges her position, power, and hence her aspects of negative and positive face. Negative face, as her authority to put Tyrion to death as she desires is being limited by his non confessing to crimes requiring a death penalty; and positive face, as he is evidently not taking the confession Activity Type (Levinson 1979) seriously.

Lyssa's directive demand for him to stop threatens both Tyrion's positive face – by showing she does not approve of his "confession" and his negative face – by forcing him to stop and not continue with his incongruent, and increasingly funny 'confessions'. Indeed, evidence in turn 8 suggests Robert's interrogative means he wants Tyrion to continue. However, with Lyssa's turn 9 – where she demands Tyrion to explain his linguistic behaviour to that point, it is now evident that she is offended by his style and content of admission and confessions. That offence has been taken, by Lyssa, appears further evident in her turn 13 where she criticises him for his "*little joke*" (*criticisms* representing both positive and negative face impoliteness – positive face, as criticisms indicate disapproval for that which has triggered the criticism, and negative face as they imply that such behaviour should not be repeated). She further offends him when she instructs the jailer, Mord, to



take him to a smaller cell with a steeper floor (the implied threat being that he will likely fall to his death from a smaller, steeper-floored sky cell shows further positive face attacks on Tyrion by Lyssa. These, however, as less likely to be deemed humorous).

Although, as fans of the show will know, we still don't know what happened when Tyrion took a Jackass and a Honeycomb into the brothel. Such linguistic behaviour, evidently offending the character of Lyssa Arryn, clearly entertained the TV watching audience who found Tyrion's confessions hilarious – much has been written online by tens of thousands of fans of the character and the show. Beyond being merely entertaining, however, we should note that as with our observations on the process of characterisation made earlier regarding Elizabeth Bennett, such impoliteness used for humorous purposes acts as evidence of Tyrion having a cunning, clever, and sarcastic mind – thereby adding to the broadening arguments for impoliteness and humour as being characterisation traits (cf. Culpeper 2001).

A perennial debate around the stylistic analyses of humor and, one imagines, around the linguistic analysis of humor more generally, is the relationship between formal patterns in text and the capacity of these patterns to induce a humorous reaction in readers, viewers or listeners. In other words, what kind of constituency separates readers who draw a humorous reading from a particular literary text from those who do not? Clearly, stylistics can here draw much from social science research and especially from empirical work on reading strategies and on reader response patterns. Related to this, and as suggested earlier in this chapter, some parodies and satirical texts draw much impetus from specific cultural reference points, but over time, these reference points become dislocated or invisible to a contemporary readership, bringing about what Nash has called 'instances of red-hot topicality gone stone-cold' (Nash 185: xii). Moreover, there are even questions regarding the comedic status of texts in their original period of production. Bex has called into question the assumption among many contemporary analysts that (all) eighteenth century satires were designed to be funny (Bex 2006). Probing other aspects of Jonathan Swift's writing (including the writer's own reflections on his technique), Bex argues that there is nothing comic in the style of the 'Proposal'; rather, the bitterness and savagery in Swift's satire might, at best, induce 'a despairing sneer' (Bex 2006: 119-120).

Other challenges for the stylistic analysis of humor include the development of a theoretically more 'joined up' approach to the relationship between comic writing and other genres of discourse; especially genres of discourse that comprise or embrace certain types of stylistic incongruity. The

language of both Surrealism and the Absurd are cases in point, although recent ground-breaking accounts of these two genres by, respectively, Stockwell (forthcoming) and Gavins (2013), go a long way to isolating the key features of language and discourse that could enable a full blown account of the humor mechanism in both artistic movements. Another challenge for stylistics is the development of better corpus tools for detecting the presence of potential humour inducing features across whole swathes of text. Again, work by corpus stylisticians like Mahlberg (2013), which charts recurring typologies in style across the entire output of the novelist Charles Dickens, offers the opportunity to circumvent localised or *ad hoc* commentary about humor in favour of a compelling descriptions of humorous techniques across *all* of a writer's work. Although no more than a snapshot of a blossoming area of inquiry, the present chapter has sought nonetheless to demonstrate both how techniques in stylistics are well suited to the exploration of verbal humor and why stylisticians have shown a continued interested over the years in this area of study.