

L N C O	096	Operator: Wu Huizhen		Dispatch: 18.09.08	PE: Suzanne Peake
		Journal Name	Manuscript No.		

Language and Linguistics Compass 2 (2008): 10.1111/j.1749-818x.2008.00096.x

# Linguistics in the Study and Teaching of Literature

Nigel Fabb\*

*University of Strathclyde*

---

## Abstract

Literary texts include linguistic form, as well as specialized literary forms (some of which also involve language). Linguistics can offer to literary studies an understanding of these kinds of form, and the ways by which a text is used to communicate meaning. In order to cope with the great variety of creative uses of language in literature, linguistics must acknowledge that some texts are assigned structure by non-linguistic means, but the boundaries between linguistic and non-linguistic explanations for literary language are not clearly drawn. The article concludes with discussion of what kinds and level of linguistics might usefully be taught in a literature classroom, and offers practical suggestions for the application of linguistics to literature teaching.

---

## *The Oddity of Literary Language*

It would seem obvious that as linguists we have a special role in the teaching of literature, because we are experts in the medium – language – from which literary texts are made. However, linguists do not have a monopoly on discussion or theorization of language in literary studies. Poets and writers, particularly in their manifestos or statements about practice, make various statements about the language of poetry which ignore or deny what linguists know about language. One characteristic claim is that a particular writing practice involves ‘a new syntax’ or that a poet ‘creates a new language’. The poet *Ece Ayhan* talks about ‘. . . pushing Turkish syntax overboard, eliding or “misplacing” syntactically connective tissues, so that words lose their linear context and explode from an unsettled center’ (Rothenberg and Joris 1998: 484). Helmut Heissenbüttel describes his own practice as ‘connections are made not through systematic and logico-syntactical interweavings, but through connotations, through ambiguities – outgrowths of a decayed syntax’ (Rothenberg and Joris 1998: 164). This is a metaphorical use of terms, such as ‘syntax’ or ‘language’, and it is not uncharacteristic of literary studies, where there is a wish for another type of language than the everyday language, a language in which new types of meaning can be communicated. How, then, can

1 we as linguists deal with these claims, and the texts from which they  
 2 emerge, and more generally speak to our colleagues who are scholars  
 3 of literature?

4 In this article, I assume a model of cognition, which most linguists will  
 5 recognize, in which cognitive processes are computations (represented by  
 6 rules and constraints) over symbols (or 'representations'). Some of these  
 7 cognitive processes are specialized for language (e.g. syntax, phonology,  
 8 and lexicon) and constitute the language faculty. A second type of cognitive  
 9 process can be thought of as 'general'; these are processes that are not  
 10 specific to particular domains, and might include general logical rules by  
 11 which one thought is derived from another (like *modus ponens*), or  
 12 general principles of analogy, or simple combinatory rules. One of the  
 13 major types of literary linguistics now active (particularly in metaphor  
 14 studies), called 'cognitive poetics', is committed to the idea that the mind  
 15 (including language) is organized entirely by general processes (Turner  
 16 1996). In contrast to 'cognitive poetics', I would like to hold open the  
 17 possibility that not only do we have language faculty processes that are  
 18 specific to language, and also general processes, but also there might  
 19 be other specific cognitive processes for particular purposes relevant to  
 20 literature and language (such as the processing of poetic meter, or narrative  
 21 form). These are the type of process identified, for example, by Tooby  
 22 and Cosmides (1992), or Sperber (1996, 2000), or Mithen (1996), or  
 23 Boyer (2001), among others (the underlying notion of 'massive modularity'  
 24 is attacked by Fodor 2000, and defended by Carruthers 2006).

25 As an example of the third type of specialized process, consider metrical  
 26 verse. A metrical text is a text that is divided into lines, such that each  
 27 of the lines is measured (crudely, has a specific number of syllables). In  
 28 addition, in almost all meters, the syllables are partitioned into two classes,  
 29 and the placement of the syllable relative to other syllables in the line can  
 30 depend on the class of the syllable; classical Greek meters, for example,  
 31 distinguish between light and heavy syllables and control for the presence  
 32 of one or the other. In Fabb and Halle (2008), we explain these two  
 33 connected properties of metrical texts by formulating a universal set of  
 34 parametrized rules that are specialized to process poetic meter. Each  
 35 meter is built from this universal set and generates from the line a certain  
 36 type of representation (a grid consisting of asterisks and parentheses); the  
 37 grid is generated step-by-step, and can be further subject to rules altering  
 38 its structure. Conditions then connect the partitioning of syllables with  
 39 the grid (e.g. requiring heavy syllables to be in particular grid positions).  
 40 The rules (and representations) involved are not part of language in general,  
 41 but they are specific to one use of language, which is meter. Perhaps other  
 42 aspects of literary cognition are devolved to specialized rule systems  
 43 (modules) in this way.

44 In the 'culture and cognition' literature (Sperber, Mithen, Boyer, etc.),  
 45 various specialized modules have been proposed – for processing information

1 about animals, or for stabilizing religious concepts, for example. Similarly,  
2 there might be a module that assigns genres to texts, or one that divides  
3 narratives into the orientation–complication–resolution–coda structure, or  
4 one that divides narratives into episodes, or one that divides a text (not  
5 necessarily metrical) into lines, verse paragraphs and other sections. In  
6 Fabb (2002), I argued that only general processes of inference are involved  
7 in these assignments of literary form to texts, based on general logical  
8 rules or notions of resemblance; that is, literary forms are concepts  
9 corresponding to categories and best understood in terms of prototypes  
10 or exemplars (Murphy 2002). However, I now think that the formal  
11 complexity of many of these types of literary form, and the systematicity  
12 and widespread similarities in the forms involved, might better be understood  
13 by thinking of them as terms in domain-specific computations: as involving  
14 distinct sets of symbols, processed by distinct rules and conditions. I will  
15 refer to them as ‘modularized’ and specifically as being central modules,  
16 to distinguish them from Fodorian input modules (Fodor 1983), including  
17 the parts of the language faculty.

18 These central modules are not specifically ‘linguistic’: they are not just  
19 part of the language faculty and might be inactive in everyday verbal  
20 behaviour. However, many of the modules for the assignment of literary  
21 form must have some access to structural descriptions assigned by the  
22 linguistic systems. For example, metrical rules must be able to identify  
23 syllables, and certain phonological characteristics of syllables. It has been  
24 argued that rhyme can ‘see’ underlying representations of sounds in some  
25 cases (Fabb 1997: 127). The determination of narrative form is often  
26 dependent on linguistic elements. Furthermore, the modules might share  
27 sub-components: Fabb and Halle (2008) argue that the same type of  
28 iterative rule is found in the language faculty (assignment of stress in  
29 words), in musical cognition, and in poetic metrical cognition.

30 Linguists have studied the symbols and rules/constraints operating in all  
31 three areas: in the language faculty, in central cognition (e.g. the study of  
32 pragmatics), and in specialized central modules (e.g. linguistic studies of  
33 meter or narrative), and linguistics offers much insight into their nature  
34 and operations. Given that literature draws on all three kinds of cognition,  
35 this suggests that linguistics has a special role in the study and teaching  
36 of literature.

37 The linguistic modules assign structural descriptions to data, each  
38 instance of which is an instance of (public) language. Where the data have  
39 been taken from actual speech, or writing, perhaps from a corpus, it may be  
40 necessary to correct the data: for example, in assigning syntactic structural  
41 descriptions, we might first remove hesitations, false starts, speech errors  
42 (although these might be kept in the data if we were for example looking  
43 at conversational structure). But literature presents a problem. Consider,  
44 for example, the poem ‘Chinese Creep’ by Kenward Elmslie, which  
45 includes the word ‘ltooth’ (in Ashbery 1974). This is presented by the text

1 as a word of English (i.e. we are not being asked to read it as an imported  
 2 foreign word), but it is not a word of English and, furthermore, cannot  
 3 be assigned a structural description by the syllable structure rules of English.  
 4 If this were non-literary data, we might treat it as a slip of the tongue or  
 5 some other performance matter, and idealize it by correcting it to 'tooth',  
 6 which can be assigned a structural description. But in the literary text,  
 7 the word is *as it is* and not the corrected version; hence, we are caught  
 8 on the one hand between recognizing the deliberate choice of a word  
 9 which cannot be assigned a structural description and on the other hand  
 10 our need to assign a structural description to the word so that we can  
 11 deliver it to further computational processes. Similar examples can be  
 12 found in all literature. For example, it is common in poetry for phrases  
 13 to be reordered, without clear functional motivation (i.e. no obvious  
 14 topicalization of the items involved; just movement). Thus, we find 'But  
 15 past is all his fame' (Goldsmith), or 'And happier they their happiness who  
 16 knew' (Shelley), sentences for which structural descriptions cannot be  
 17 assigned by the syntactic rules, because they require transformations which  
 18 are unmotivated or impossible.

19 Another kind of problem is presented by texts where words are combined  
 20 in lists, and not clearly combined by any syntactic means at all; do we  
 21 correct these texts by first formulating sentences based on them, and then  
 22 subjecting these sentences to the syntactic rules which assign them structural  
 23 descriptions? Austin (1984) explores various ways of handling the oddity  
 24 of literary language. One possibility which some linguists endorse is that  
 25 there is a different syntax for literary texts (e.g. there might be a syntax  
 26 in which movement is free rather than functionally driven); a radical  
 27 variant of this was proposed by Thorne (1965) who proposed that each  
 28 poem might have its own grammar. Another possibility is that the language  
 29 faculty assigns structural description to whatever fragments or parts of the  
 30 text it can (e.g. to isolated phrases), but that the phrases are concatenated  
 31 by general cognitive processes, not by syntactic rules. The larger texts so  
 32 produced may resemble sentences but they are not as wholes assigned  
 33 structural descriptions by the syntax, and the syntax provides no explanation  
 34 of why they take the form they do. For example, a sequence by Pope, 'on  
 35 her white breast a sparkling cross she wore', cannot be directly assigned a  
 36 structural description as a whole by the syntax. This is for two reasons.  
 37 First, there is no obvious motivation for movement of the phrases – they are  
 38 not obviously topicalized, but rather appear to have just been reordered  
 39 'for stylistic reasons' (which could include fitting the required metrical  
 40 pattern, clearly not a syntactically formulable requirement). Under mini-  
 41 malist approaches to syntax, phrases do not move unless they are forced  
 42 to by some feature; hence, the syntax should not be able to move these  
 43 phrases. Second, movement of the object to between subject and verb is  
 44 an illegitimate movement generally in English; so both structurally and  
 45 informationally, the sentence is not derivable by the syntactic rules.

1 It is always worth remembering that the text of a literary work can be  
 2 produced by non-linguistic means, even if it is made of linguistic material.  
 3 Borges's (1998) 'Library of Babel' contains on its shelves books, whose  
 4 totality constitutes every possible combination of the letters of the alphabet  
 5 – hence, contains all actual books and all possible books. The copy of  
 6 *Pride and Prejudice* in this library was not composed by linguistic means,  
 7 even though it contains what look like actual words and sentences; in this  
 8 library, it is an accidental combination of a sequence of letters. Less  
 9 alarmingly, many literary texts in practice are composed by simple (non-  
 10 linguistic) processes of concatenation and juxtaposition of component  
 11 parts; a poem consisting just of nouns has no syntactic structure. These  
 12 extreme examples are not divided by any clear boundary from 'ordinary'  
 13 literary texts, and in Fabb (2004), I raise the possibility that the language  
 14 of any literary text might be a copy or representation of language, rather  
 15 than 'the real thing'. If this is true, then we can never take for granted  
 16 that any part of a text should be assigned a structural description.

### 17 18 *Meaning*

19  
 20 In the literature classroom, the dominant concern is to establish 'what a  
 21 text is about', either at the large scale of understanding the meanings of  
 22 a story, or in a smaller way establishing the ambiguous meanings of a  
 23 poem, or how a metaphor is used. Many teachers of literature are happy  
 24 for students to pursue their own interpretations of the text. In part, this  
 25 comes from the recognition which literary studies share with linguistic  
 26 theory that the realities of how communication works are such that the  
 27 speaker/writer's meaning can never be finally established (short of telepathy).  
 28 But in part the literature teacher's relatively relaxed view of interpretation  
 29 comes also from a romantic view that literature produces meanings which  
 30 can in some sense be perceived or apprehended but cannot be represented  
 31 by being put into words. A large part of the literary ambition (cited in  
 32 the previous section) to 'create a new language' has as its goal the expression  
 33 of these new and otherwise ungraspable or unstateable kinds of meaning,  
 34 which are outside our ordinary systems and modes of explanation (i.e. beyond  
 35 the capacity of linguistic theory to explain). If we are to teach semantics  
 36 to literature students, we need to give some respect to this view that there  
 37 are meanings that are beyond us. Ideally, we want to be able to teach  
 38 students a semantics that helps them understand some of the mechanisms  
 39 by which meaning is communicated, without closing off some of the more  
 40 inspiring notions of meaning that come from literary theory and the ideas  
 41 of poets. Two potential areas of exploration include Sperber and Wilson's  
 42 notion of 'poetic effects' that are produced by the generation of a large  
 43 number of weak implicatures, as in a metaphor or evocation (Sperber and  
 44 Wilson 1995), and Sperber's proposals about the rationality of apparently  
 45 irrational beliefs (Sperber 1985); for further discussion, see Fabb (1995).

*Appropriate Use of Linguistic Theory in the Literature Classroom*

In this section, I discuss the terminology that we use for describing the language of a literary text. It is best illustrated with an example. In seventeenth-century poetry, certain types of imagery are called 'conceits'; these are metaphors that are often conventional (i.e. similar metaphors can be found in earlier and classical literature; Ruthven 1969) and deployed over an extended part of a text, often as part of a structured argument. The term 'conceit' is a word of English, known to practitioners and useful in understanding how those practitioners imagined their own literary practice. We might call it a 'Rhetorical Term', because it is part of a known and formalized poetics (a rhetoric). If we take a relevance-theoretic approach to conceits, we might instead understand them as a particular exploitation of the principle of relevance; we might say that 'conceit' is not a well-formed notion at this level, and not useful in understanding how metaphors are processed in the mind, and we might introduce the term 'implicature' in discussing this, and give it the technical meaning specific to relevance theory (where an implicature is an intended implication or contextual assumption). The term 'implicature' would be a 'theoretical term': it exists only as a component of the theory itself. Literary scholars tend to take what might be called an ethnographic approach and work with rhetorical terms, while linguists tend to take a universalizing or mentalistic approach and work with theoretical terms. In the teaching of literature from a linguistic perspective, a middle way is useful, as I now explain.

When I teach about metaphor (in my class on semantics for literature students), I teach Grice's four maxims, and the co-operative principle, and I expect the students to be able to identify which of the maxims is being flouted; in a conceit, the maxim of quality is almost certainly flouted (as more generally in metaphors). I teach this, despite having no theoretical commitment to the notion of maxims; in fact, I take the relevance-theoretic position that the maxims can be dispensed with entirely. So for me, the term 'maxim of quality' is a 'useful term': it is neither part of a general rhetoric nor of any theory that I have a commitment to, but I find it useful. Why, then, teach something that I (strictly) do not believe? I do so because I think students need a fairly rich terminology for description, and as a way of understanding how texts work; a good theory reduces its terminology as much as possible (by Occam's razor), but this is not necessarily good for the classroom. The maxims are relatively easy to understand; although the difference between the four maxims is problematic, this is also a stimulus to discussion. In contrast, I find that the theoretically most convincing account provided by relevance theory gives too little for the student to grasp hold of and work with, and it is too difficult without extensive study, compared with the easier notions of the maxims.



1 I think that this improvised and emergent approach characterizes not  
2 only stylistics teaching, but also stylistics as a practice: just as it is  
3 intermediate between literary studies and linguistics, so its useful termi-  
4 nology is intermediate between the rhetorical terminology of literary  
5 studies and the theoretical terminology of linguistics. Stylisticians often  
6 pick and choose which elements of a linguistic theory they think will  
7 work effectively, and they are happy to combine incompatible theoretical  
8 components with each other because they work well as ways of getting  
9 at texts. As teachers of linguistics and literature, we must always decide  
10 where we stand on any terminological issue. Here is an example. In the  
11 stylistics literature (e.g. Leech and Short 1981), a distinction is drawn  
12 between various different ways of representing in a fiction a character's  
13 thoughts or speech. 'Direct' representations quote the speech or thought;  
14 'indirect' representations re-state the speech or thought from the narrator's  
15 (temporal, spatial) perspective. 'Free indirect' representations mix the two  
16 of these, giving the effect of a third-person narration that is intermixed  
17 with the character's perspective (common in the nineteenth-century novel  
18 from Jane Austen onwards). We might treat these as distinct theoretical  
19 terms. Although I use them in teaching, I think of them as useful terms,  
20 and in addition, I use the theoretical term 'metarepresentation'. From the  
21 perspective of a theory of metarepresentations, a sentence that represents  
22 another sentence (e.g. what someone says or thinks) is a metarepresentation,  
23 and there is no theoretical distinction between a metarepresentation that  
24 very closely resembles the original (as in direct speech) and a metarepre-  
25 sentation that less closely resembles the original (as in indirect or free  
26 indirect speech). I teach the students the useful terms, because it gives  
27 them a rich descriptive vocabulary, and when they run into trouble in a  
28 particular text (which blurs the boundaries), this too is interesting. But I  
29 also teach the notion of 'metarepresentation' that replaces these terms;  
30 while I would not always teach high theory, in this case the full theory is  
31 easy to understand, relatively independent of other notions, and very  
32 useful in general as a way of thinking about literature. It is a judgement  
33 call: we make them all the time when we choose a linguistic terminology  
34 for the literature classroom.

35 However, there is another reason to keep various different types of  
36 terminology in play. Rhetorical terms (and perhaps useful terms) are part  
37 of what we know about literature, and enter into the inferences we draw  
38 about literary texts. When a writer uses a particular type of metaphor, it  
39 may be with the intention that that specific type should be recognized  
40 and take its place in the processing of implicatures communicated by the  
41 text (e.g. as a way of saying 'I am literature'). Furthermore, just as explicit  
42 cultural notions may reflect modular thinking (e.g. a verbal taxonomy may  
43 reflect the way the taxonomic module works), so rhetorical terms may  
44 provide some insight into the working of literature-specific modules. And  
45 if, as I suggested earlier, the language of a literary text already has an

1 uncertain relation to the language faculty, then the absolute value of  
 2 theoretical terminology is called into question. Perhaps principles of the  
 3 language faculty such as ‘last resort’ (permitting movement of a syntactic  
 4 constituent only when it is required) are just irrelevant to Pope’s literary  
 5 practice, if Pope is constructing sentences by concatenating phrases  
 6 together in whatever order serves other formal purposes. It is similarly  
 7 worth noting that most of the syntactic rules for poetry can be stated in  
 8 terms of ‘school grammar’, relating to the surface of the text, and often  
 9 framed in terms of constructions (i.e. descriptive terms not delivered by  
 10 current generative approaches).

11  
 12 *‘Choice’ and the Practice of Stylistics*

13  
 14 The same explicature (explicit meaning) can be derived from different  
 15 sentences. Thus, for example, a specific eventuality can be represented by  
 16 an active sentence, a passive sentence, or a noun phrase. The participants  
 17 might be explicitly denoted – by a full noun phrase or by a pronoun –  
 18 or not denoted (as, for example, in a passive sentence where the agent is  
 19 unexpressed). If it takes place in the past, the sentence might be in past  
 20 tense or in non-past tense (i.e. ‘conversational historic present’); indica-  
 21 tions of modality or evidentiality can be added, or not added; the sentence  
 22 might bring out the extent to which the eventuality is an activity or an  
 23 accomplishment or an achievement; various parts of the sentence might  
 24 be put into focus (e.g. by order or intonation). The sentence can be  
 25 modified in these ways, without fundamentally altering its explicit meaning  
 26 (although some aspects of meaning, and information structure are altered  
 27 thereby). Much work in stylistics has emphasized the ways in which  
 28 writers – particularly writers of literary texts – make functionally driven  
 29 stylistic choices of this kind. In fact, Halliday’s ‘systemic grammar’ (Halliday  
 30 and Martin 1981), which has been an important theoretical framework  
 31 for much British and Australian stylistics, places the notion of choice  
 32 within a system at the heart of the theory.

33 To illustrate, I cite a jocular British folk tale (the full text is in Briggs  
 34 1991). I use it as the basis of an exercise in Fabb (1997). It tells the story  
 35 of a bunch of idiots who decide to capture a cuckoo and to imprison it  
 36 in a hedge (without a roof), because they believe that the presence of a  
 37 cuckoo magically guarantees the harvest. The story ends like this, with  
 38 my numbers added at boundaries between clauses: “‘Now”, say they,  
 39 “Us’ll have three harvests this year. Look how the hedge be a-growing!”  
 40 [1] Cuckoo were growing too. [2] Well, the hedge grew nice and high,  
 41 and the cuckoo grew his wings, [3] and he flied nice and high. And he  
 42 went!’ At [1], the tense changes from non-past (conversational historic  
 43 present) to past without changing the time reference; at [2], the aspect  
 44 changes from imperfective (progressive) to perfective while describing  
 45 essentially the same occurrences; and there is a change in inherent aspect,



1 where the sentences represent more or less the same events but with  
 2 different inherent aspects – the actions up to [2] are activities, after [2] are  
 3 accomplishments, and after [3] are achievements. The shifts in tense,  
 4 aspect and inherent aspect do not really correlate with significant differences  
 5 in what is being represented; instead, these would be largely understood  
 6 under a stylistics analysis as different choices of how to represent the  
 7 events of the story. Why does the story shift stylistically in this way at the  
 8 end? In part, because the story is an extended joke, and the punch  
 9 line must emerge quickly: the rapid changes perhaps create this effect  
 10 (more generally, these kinds of weakly motivated change often mark  
 11 boundaries in a text, of this kind). The shifts themselves, from present  
 12 imperfective activity to past perfective accomplishment and then achievement,  
 13 represent symbolically the way in which the cuckoo overcomes the static  
 14 and repetitive world of the idiots, who live in an eternal foolish present  
 15 (next year, presumably, they will try the same again). But this is at the  
 16 level of interpretation; this meaning is not encoded into the sentence by  
 17 the tenses, or aspects.

#### 18 19 *What Are the Components of a Literary Linguistics Education?*

20  
21 In discussing the areas that might be covered in the teaching of linguistics  
 22 to literature students, I return to the tripartite division with which I began  
 23 – into (a) the language faculty, (b) central processes involving inference,  
 24 analogy, etc., and (c) specialized rules for governing literary forms.

25 The language faculty includes syntax/semantics, the lexicon, and phonology,  
 26 and perhaps other components, such as a distinct morphology.

- 27
- 28 • Syntactic structure: I am not convinced that the study of literature  
 29 requires a highly theorized account of syntactic structure. If students can  
 30 identify major overt constituents (particularly noun phrases, and the  
 31 broad structure of the sentence, along even traditional lines), they will  
 32 be able to make good literary use of this skill, for example, in under-  
 33 standing how enjambment works, or understanding parallelism, or  
 34 structural ambiguity, or the organization of periodic sentences and the  
 35 paratactic–hypotactic distinction. Some knowledge of the distinction  
 36 between grammatical roles (subject, object) and thematic roles (agent,  
 37 patient) is useful, particularly for those kinds of stylistics that emphasize  
 38 how alternative formulations of a sentence (i.e. ‘transitivity’ distinctions)  
 39 can reveal or conceal components of an eventuality. The tense–aspect–  
 40 modal systems are relatively easy to teach (at least for English), and are  
 41 of relevance for understanding various literary processes. In particular,  
 42 tense is important in narrative; aspect is important for the study of  
 43 metarepresentational processes, such as the representation of speech and  
 44 thought; and modality is important for certain genres (such as ghost  
 45 stories and detective fiction).

- 1 • Phonology: literature students need to know what a syllable is, its structure,  
2 and some basic facts about consonants and vowels (including the feature  
3 breakdown of these sounds). There is some reason to think that some  
4 understanding of levels of phonological representation is relevant (e.g.  
5 some sound patterning is based on the output of lexical, some on  
6 post-lexical rules, and sometimes underlying forms are also relevant).  
7 The link between linguistics and Parisian structuralism can also be  
8 clarified by an understanding of some historical issues in phonology  
9 (such as distinctive features and archiphonemes).
- 10 • The lexicon and morphology: the organization of lexical items into  
11 collocations or 'semantic fields' is a fundamental feature of many literary  
12 texts. Relations of synonymy and antonymy are important for parallelism.  
13 Names have a special status, as do epithets and other periphrastic modes  
14 of naming. The 'classic' examples for discussing morphology in the  
15 literature classroom involve texts with neologisms such as Carroll's  
16 'Jabberwocky', and there are many other similar examples (I prefer  
17 *Finnegans Wake*) involving either new words formed by affixation or by  
18 compounding. Otherwise, an understanding of morphology can help a  
19 student recognize parallelisms and patterns in a text (involving morpho-  
20 logically similar words), and relates also to matters of tense and aspect.

21  
22 Pragmatics is the study of the ways in which central processes, such as  
23 inferencing operate. Here, the central goal is to ensure that students  
24 understand that communication 'takes place at a risk' because it depends on  
25 pragmatic as well as coded (language faculty) processes, and that this is  
26 possible because there are 'ways in which a statement implies the truth of  
27 certain other statements' (Austin 1975: 47), by implicature, entailment and  
28 presupposition. In practice, I find that it is easy enough to get students to  
29 understand the basic point, but much harder to teach them how to model  
30 actual inferential processes. It is possible to teach simple rules such as  
31 modus ponens, which is one of the engines of inferencing, but difficult  
32 on the one hand to produce anything revealing by working at this level  
33 of detail, and also difficult to get my literature students, who otherwise  
34 know no logic, to write modus ponens rules correctly. As with various  
35 other aspects of 'literary linguistics', we might expect too much of literature  
36 students (particularly in writing rules and writing out structural descrip-  
37 tions) when we have not already taught them how to be linguists. Other  
38 areas in general pragmatics that are relevant for literary studies include  
39 metaphor and other forms of figurative language, and irony and related  
40 practices (traditional notions such as 'metaphor' and 'irony' may be better  
41 thought of as 'rhetorical' notions rather than theoretical ones), Irony is  
42 one of a range of literary devices, including representation of speech and  
43 thought (see above), and what literary scholars call 'focalization' (where  
44 events are viewed via a character) that are rather simply explained via  
45 the notions of metarepresentation and propositional attitude. Metaphor

1 has been subject to various quite different ways of explanation in linguistics,  
 2 some of which look to the pragmatics (e.g. older relevance-theoretic  
 3 accounts in terms of interpretive resemblance), some of which look to the  
 4 lexicon (e.g. newer relevance-theoretic accounts of broadening and  
 5 narrowing of encyclopaedic entries; Wilson and Carston 2006).

6 If there are specialized cognitive modules which are relevant to literature,  
 7 different modules might perform the following tasks.

- 8
- 9 • Division of a text into hierarchically organized sections, such as lines,  
 10 various kinds of superline (the couplet, *Langzeile*), stanzas, etc. Evidence  
 11 that this is a specialized module rather than just a general process of  
 12 dividing any material into sections comes from various cross-linguistic  
 13 generalizations, and indeed, the striking fact that all literatures in all  
 14 languages appear to include verse (text divided into lines). Section  
 15 boundaries often coincide with linguistic constituent boundaries or are  
 16 otherwise marked by linguistically explainable phenomena (such as  
 17 rhyme). Lines whose boundaries do not coincide with linguistic  
 18 constituents (e.g. in enjambment) are particularly interesting, as there is  
 19 clearly some sensitivity to linguistic structure – whether syntactic or  
 20 prosodic – so that although divisions ‘violate’ constituency, they do not  
 21 do so at random.
  - 22 • Assignment of a meter to a line of verse. Fabb and Halle (2008) present  
 23 a theory of how this is achieved, using rules which generate a grid from  
 24 the line of verse, which is then subject to conditions. Learning about  
 25 meter involves also learning about syllables (in English), learning about  
 26 stress, and learning about vowels and consonants – in order to understand  
 27 why some syllables (e.g. vowel-final before vowel-initial) can be ignored  
 28 by the metrical rules. Metrical theory is particularly difficult for students,  
 29 partly because the relevant intuitions seem to be difficult to access: in  
 30 my experience, they find it difficult to describe rhythmic patterns (e.g.  
 31 working out which syllable in a polysyllable has the greatest stress).  
 32 Metrics is an interesting area for literary linguistics, because there are a  
 33 number of competing linguistic accounts. Although underplayed in  
 34 much current literature teaching, this is also an area which has been  
 35 traditionally well-described (we inherit a wealth of ‘rhetorical terms’ for  
 36 describing metrical phenomena) and, indeed, has been subject to quite  
 37 sophisticated pre-linguistic theorizing: think of English poetic analysis  
 38 around 1600, or Snorri Sturluson’s analysis of Icelandic poetic form in  
 39 his thirteenth-century *Edda*.
  - 40 • The identification of parallelism, usually involving syntactically similar  
 41 structures with different (but related) words. Parallelism shows similar  
 42 characteristics across a range of literatures, and is very widespread: an  
 43 indication that it might involve module-specific types of formal description.  
 44 A basic grounding in syntactic analysis is adequate to identify many  
 45 cases of parallelism. It is worth looking at how parallelism interacts with

- 1 other types of literary form, such as lineation (parallelism seems in fact  
2 to work *against* some kinds of form, such as meter).
- 3 • The division of a narrative into functionally distinct sections, such as  
4 orientation (setting the stage), complication and resolution, and coda  
5 (bringing the narrative back to the moment of narration). These notions  
6 are similar to those found in traditional analysis, but were decisively  
7 theorized by Labov and Waletzky (1997) in their analysis of oral narratives.  
8 This type of formal description is not particularly linguistic as such: it  
9 may hold for all kinds of narrative, whether verbal or non-verbal, and  
10 the particular relevance for linguistics is in Labov and Waletzky's  
11 demonstration that the boundary between complication and resolution  
12 can be marked by stylistic choices (such as repetition, etc.) of the kind  
13 discussed earlier, which do not alter the propositional content. A similar  
14 point can be made about a rather different principle of organization,  
15 where a narrative is divided into episodes (perhaps in a module distinct  
16 from the complication–resolution form); as Hymes (1981) has shown,  
17 episode boundaries are similarly marked by specific stylistic choices  
18 when the stories are told in language.
  - 19 • The identification of sound patterning, such as rhyme and alliteration.  
20 This is an opportunity to teach literature students about consonants and  
21 vowels, and syllable structure (because rhyme and alliteration each focus  
22 on a specific sub-part of the syllable). Two negative goals are important  
23 here: to persuade the students that letters and sounds do not fully  
24 correspond (i.e. *church* and *cat* and *cinema* do not alliterate), and that  
25 sound symbolism is a pragmatic and contextually driven effect and not  
26 a coded association of sound and meaning. I favor non-literary but  
27 creative examples such as tongue twisters (great for getting students to  
28 understand the feature-based relation between similar sounds), or non-  
29 English examples such as the Welsh *cynghanedd* system (where sequences  
30 of consonants are repeated between halves of the line).
  - 31 • The assignment of texts to genres. In Fabb (2002), I claim that this must  
32 be understood as a central, rather than modularized, process. Thus, for  
33 example, I suggest that a text is a sonnet not as a fact about the text  
34 which somehow inheres in the text itself, but instead by virtue of the  
35 text's providing evidence for the thought 'this text is a sonnet', where  
36 this thought is derived by inferential procedures (mainly *modus ponens*)  
37 which depend on evidence provided by the text, in the context of  
38 general knowledge about sonnets. Thus, if the text has 14 lines (evidence  
39 provided by the text) and we know that a sonnet has 14 lines, then this  
40 is one reason for thinking that the text is a sonnet. The more reasons,  
41 the stronger the evidence for the thought that 'this text is a sonnet'. I  
42 think that it is worth speculating on whether there are specialized processes  
43 which enable us to identify the genres of texts – again, because generic  
44 identification seems similar cross-linguistically, even down to the genres  
45 which exist, and also because all literatures seem to require generic

1 identification. There are areas of linguistics which have paid particular  
 2 attention to genre identification; for example, the theory of 'register' in  
 3 systemic linguistics, or the theory of 'ways of speaking' (Hymes 1989).  
 4 Language may also provide key evidence for genre identification, and  
 5 so again there is a link between linguistics and literature.

### 6 7 8 *Conclusion*

9 It is possible for linguistics and literary studies to share the notion of  
 10 'language'. Linguists have specialist knowledge of the language faculty,  
 11 without which language and hence literature is impossible. But some  
 12 aspects of literary language are best described not by appeal to the language  
 13 faculty, but in terms of general and central processes involving inference,  
 14 resemblance or concatenation, or in terms of specialized (literary-)formal  
 15 mechanisms. These latter aspects of literary study, involving both form  
 16 and meaning, are more characteristically in the domain of literary theory,  
 17 but here too linguists can have a role in clarifying questions and  
 18 formulating explanations.

### 19 20 21 *Acknowledgements*

22 Thanks to my Strathclyde University students, to Maya Honda, and for  
 23 their very useful comments, to Sharon Klein and an anonymous reviewer.

### 24 25 26 *Short Biography*

27 Nigel Fabb is Professor of Literary Linguistics at the University of Strathclyde.  
 28 He is an editor of *Journal of Linguistics*, and editor, author or co-author of  
 29 nine books, of which the most recent are (with Mairi Blackings) *A*  
 30 *Grammar of Ma'di*, and (with Morris Halle) *Meter in Poetry: a New Theory*.

### 31 32 33 *Note*

34 \* Correspondence address: Nigel Fabb, Department of English Studies, University of Strathclyde,  
 35 26 Richmond Street, Glasgow G1 1XH, UK. E-mail: n.fabb@strath.ac.uk.

### 36 37 38 *Works Cited*

- 39 Ashbery, John. (ed.) 1974. Penguin modern poets: K. Elmslie, K. Koch, J. Schuyler. London,  
 40 UK: Penguin.  
 41 Austin, J. L. 1975. How to do things with words, 2nd edn. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.  
 42 Austin, Timothy R. 1984. Language crafted. A linguistic theory of poetic syntax. Bloomington,  
 43 IN: Indiana University Press.  
 44 Borges, Jorge Luis. 1998. The library of Babel. (first published 1944) Collected fictions, ed. by  
 45 Jorge Luis Borges and trans. by Andrew Hurley, 112–18. London, UK: Allen Lane.  
 Boyer, Pascal. 2001. Religion explained. The human instincts that fashion gods. spirits and  
 ancestors. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- 1 Briggs, Katharine M. 1991. *A dictionary of British folk-tales in the English language. Part A*  
 2 *folk narratives*. London, UK: Routledge.
- 3 Carruthers, Peter. 2006. *The architecture of the mind*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- 4 Fabb, Nigel. 1995. The density of response: a problem for literary criticism and cognitive  
 5 science. *Linguistic Approaches to Literature: papers in literary stylistics*. (Discourse Analysis  
 6 Monographs 17), ed. by J. Payne and J. Wheatley, 143–57. Birmingham, UK: University of  
 7 Birmingham.
- 8 ——. 1997. *Linguistics and literature: language in the verbal arts of the world*. Oxford, UK:  
 9 Blackwell.
- 10 ——. 2002. *Language and literary structure: the linguistic analysis of form in verse and narrative*.  
 11 Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- 12 ——. 2004. Form as fiction. *Belgian Journal of English Language and Literatures New series*  
 13 2.63–73.
- 14 Fabb, Nigel, and Morris Halle. 2008. *Meter in poetry: a new theory*. Cambridge, UK:  
 15 Cambridge University Press.
- 16 Fodor, Jerry. 1983. *The modularity of mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- 17 ——. 2000. *The mind doesn't work that way*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- 18 Halliday, M. A. K., and J. R. Martin. (ed.) 1981. *Readings in systemic linguistics*. London,  
 19 UK: Batsford.
- 20 Hymes, Dell. 1981. *Essays in Native American ethnopoetics*. Philadelphia, PA: University of  
 21 Pennsylvania Press.
- 22 ——. 1989. Ways of speaking. *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*, ed. by R. Bauman  
 23 and J. Sherzer, 433–51. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- 24 Labov, William, and Joshua Waletzky. 1997. *Narrative Analysis. Oral Versions of Personal*  
 25 *Experience*. First published in 1967. *Oral versions of personal experience: three decades of*  
 26 *narrative analysis. Journal of narrative and life history (volume 7, Special Issue)*, ed. by  
 27 Michael G.W. Bamberg, 1–14. London, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- 28 Leech, G., and M. Short. 1981. *Style in fiction. A linguistic introduction to English fictional*  
 29 *prose*. London, UK: Longman.
- 30 Mithen, Steven. 1996. *The prehistory of the mind. A search for the origins of art, religion and*  
 31 *science*. London, UK: Thames and Hudson.
- 32 Murphy, Gregory L. 2002. *The big book of concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- 33 Rothenberg, Jerome, and Pierre Joris. (eds.) 1998. *Poems for the millennium*. Berkeley, CA:  
 34 University of California Press.
- 35 Ruthven, K. K. 1969. *The conceit*. London, UK: Methuen.
- 36 Sperber, Dan. 1985. *On anthropological knowledge*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University  
 37 Press.
- 38 ——. 1996. *Explaining culture. A naturalistic approach*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- 39 Sperber, Dan. (ed.) 2000. *Metarepresentations. A multidisciplinary perspective*. New York, NY:  
 40 Oxford University Press.
- 41 Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. 1995. *Relevance: communication and cognition*, 2nd edn.  
 42 Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- 43 Thorne, James Peter. 1965. Stylistics and generative grammars. *Journal of Linguistics* 1.49–59.
- 44 Tooby, John, and Leda Cosmides. 1992. The psychological foundations of culture. *The adapted*  
 45 *mind. Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture*, ed. by Jerome H. Barkow,  
 Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, 19–136. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Turner, Mark. 1996. *The literary mind. The origins of thought and language*. Oxford, UK:  
 Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, D., and R. Carston. 2006. Metaphor, relevance and the 'emergent property' issue.  
*Mind and Language* 21(3).404–33.



# MARKED PROOF

## Please correct and return this set

Please use the proof correction marks shown below for all alterations and corrections. If you wish to return your proof by fax you should ensure that all amendments are written clearly in dark ink and are made well within the page margins.

<i>Instruction to printer</i>	<i>Textual mark</i>	<i>Marginal mark</i>
Leave unchanged	... under matter to remain	Ⓟ
Insert in text the matter indicated in the margin	∧	New matter followed by ∧ or ∧ <sup>Ⓢ</sup>
Delete	/ through single character, rule or underline or ┌───┐ through all characters to be deleted	Ⓞ or Ⓞ <sup>Ⓢ</sup>
Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)	/ through letter or ┌───┐ through characters	new character / or new characters /
Change to italics	— under matter to be changed	↙
Change to capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	≡
Change to small capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	≡
Change to bold type	~ under matter to be changed	~
Change to bold italic	≈ under matter to be changed	≈
Change to lower case	Encircle matter to be changed	≡
Change italic to upright type	(As above)	⊕
Change bold to non-bold type	(As above)	⊖
Insert 'superior' character	/ through character or ∧ where required	Υ or Υ under character e.g. Υ or Υ
Insert 'inferior' character	(As above)	∧ over character e.g. ∧
Insert full stop	(As above)	⊙
Insert comma	(As above)	,
Insert single quotation marks	(As above)	Ƴ or ƴ and/or ƶ or Ʒ
Insert double quotation marks	(As above)	ƶ or Ʒ and/or Ʒ or ƶ
Insert hyphen	(As above)	⊥
Start new paragraph	┌	┌
No new paragraph	┐	┐
Transpose	└┐	└┐
Close up	linking ○ characters	Ⓞ
Insert or substitute space between characters or words	/ through character or ∧ where required	Υ
Reduce space between characters or words		↑