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Language and Literature 2007 16: 37

DOI: 10.1177/0963947007072844

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ARTICLE

The 'dual voice' of free indirect discourse: a reading experiment

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Abstract

The emergence of cognitive poetics has focused attention on how stylistic features are processed by readers. One area ripe for empirical investigation in this respect is point of view. Little attention has previously been paid in cognitive science to the specifics of how point of view is identified during reading. This essay reports on an experiment designed to examine how readers respond to a narrative style that has attracted a great deal of interest from both stylisticians and literary critics: free indirect discourse. The experiment tested two questions in particular: (1) Do readers hear a 'dual voice' when reading passages of free indirect discourse? and (2) What kind of 'contexts' influence the identification of point of view? Some critics have noted the importance of the preceding co-text in deciding whose point of view is present in ambiguous passages; this experiment suggests that the succeeding co-text might also be relevant. This in turn has implications for the flexibility of the reading process, especially when more than one point of view may be present.

Keywords: cognitive poetics; 'dual voice' hypothesis; point of view; recontextualization; succeeding co-text

1 Introduction

Recent years have seen a proliferation of scholarship within the emerging fields of cognitive poetics and cognitive stylistics.¹ For Stockwell, cognitive poetics is 'a science of reading', and involves 'understanding what we do when we engage in reading literature' (2002: 2). As Emmott puts it, 'cognitive poetic theories aim to give a detailed account of the balance between language and mind during text processing, taking particular account of stylistic factors that are often ignored by cognitive scientists' (2003: 158). Some attention has been given in cognitive science to the effects of point of view on the reading process. However, the way that readers decide whose point of view is present in a text, whether from linguistic signals or from the surrounding context, has rarely been the subject of empirical investigation. The recent development of cognitive-poetic frameworks and theories offers a welcome opportunity to examine more closely just how readers identify point of view. In this essay, I report on an experiment designed to test how readers respond to free indirect discourse, a narrative style in which, as many critics have noted, point of view can be hard to determine and ambiguous.

Some cognitive psychologists have recognized the general importance of point of view in reading. Black et al., for example, propose that 'people prefer



to interpret narrative and descriptive discourses from a consistent perspective or point of view' (1979: 187). They discovered that 'subjects read statements exhibiting a consistent point of view faster than statements exhibiting a change in point of view, and they rated the consistent statements as more comprehensible than change statements' (p. 187). Recent experimental work has sought to clarify the effects of point of view on the reading process further. Van Peer and Pander Maat investigated 'effects of perspective on the allocation of sympathy to characters in a story', examining the consequences of shifting between both 'first/third person narration' and 'internal/external perspective' (1996: 146, 144). They found that 'some manipulations of point of view do have an observable, and predictable, effect, though less strong and less general than expected' (p. 149). In his study of 'whether variations of internal versus external narrative perspective in a short story enhance requirements for interpretative work on behalf of the reader' (1999: 50), László similarly discovered that while 'narrative point of view does affect mental representation' (p. 54), somewhat surprisingly 'changes in point of view do not entail an extra-increase in reading time' (p. 52). One possible explanation is that 'literary reading slows down reading to such an extent that point of view effects cannot be detected anymore' (p. 52). Thus, while it is clear that point of view affects the reading process, the precise effects of shifts in narrative perspective have proved hard to specify. As van Peer and Maat put it: 'Although narratology has devoted considerable energy to describing the various textual devices that constitute "point of view", not much is known of its real effects on the reading process and its outcome with any certainty' (1996: 145).²

Even greater uncertainty surrounds the issue of how point of view is actually identified during reading. Sanford et al. note that 'most existing empirical work on focalizers has concentrated on anaphoric and other reference devices [...] as a means of both identifying the focalizer and understanding the process of taking a perspective' (1998: 1323).³ They propose, however, that 'there is another way of identifying the focalizer: to test whether background information is taken as being experienced (noticed by, or otherwise affecting) a character in a short text, even when there is no *direct* connection between that character and the background information' (p. 1323). Thus they looked at sentences where there were 'no explicit cues' as to who the focalizer is, yet that 'require a character's perspective in order to be properly processed' (p. 1324). They claim, for example, that '*The air was hot and sticky* has a "psychological" predicate, in that to evaluate its truth it is necessary to check whether some experiencer finds the air to be hot and sticky' (p. 1324). Thus, in their view:

a sentence like *The air was hot and sticky* would be interpreted as experienced by a character in a text, and [...] the attribution of such experience would be more likely to a main character than to a secondary one, on the grounds that main characters have been identified within narratology as being the typical focalizer in simple stories with no direct perspective cues. (Sanford et al., 1998: 1323)⁴

Yet this account perhaps underestimates the complications involved in identifying narrative perspective. Recognizing a focalizer depends on more than the presence of “‘psychological’ predicates”, since narrators can also function as experiencers, and it is possible for such sentences as *‘The air was hot and sticky’* to occur in so-called ‘omniscient’ third-person narration. In fact isolated sentences by themselves may give little indication of point of view; more surrounding co-text is often required. Furthermore, Sanford et al.’s account does not allow for the possible ambiguity between narrator’s and character’s points of view, especially when ‘direct perspective cues’ are absent. Much 20th-century criticism of literary narrative has focused on the particular stylistic technique by which such an ambiguity of perspective is generated, now known widely as free indirect discourse, and shown that it is especially prevalent in the 19th- and 20th-century novel.⁵ Some critics have even claimed that readers experience a ‘dual voice’ when reading passages of narrative fiction in which both the narrator’s and an experiencing character’s points of view appear to be present.

2 Free indirect discourse and the ‘dual voice’

Consider the following example from Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Elizabeth has just heard about her sister Lydia’s elopement with Wickham:

She had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydia had any partiality for him; but she was convinced that Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to any body. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl! – oh! how acutely did she now feel it. (Austen, 1996 [1813]: 227)

The passage provides an example of free indirect thought, a variety of free indirect discourse which, in Lodge’s words, ‘allows the novelist to give intimate access to a character’s thoughts’ (1990: 126).⁶ After the first sentence indirectly reporting Elizabeth’s thoughts, the narrative seems to enter her mind as she considers her sister’s behaviour. Though there are, in Sanford et al.’s terms, ‘no explicit cues’ to mark the entry into her consciousness, the context suggests that her perspective is present in ‘Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion’, and, ‘Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object.’ The verbs of perception (‘had never perceived’) and cognition (‘was convinced’) are a hint that the character’s point of view will follow, while consideration of the two characters and their behaviour in the novel up to this point would suggest that these are Elizabeth’s opinions of her younger sister. In the final sentence, there are clearer indications of the elder sister’s point of view. Indeed this sentence demonstrates some of the most commonly cited markers of figural point of view, including the interjection

'oh!', the exclamation marks, the evaluative words and phrases 'mischief of neglect', 'mistaken indulgence' and 'such', and the present time-deictic 'now'. As is typical in free indirect discourse, these are combined with the third person and past tense of indirect report, thus producing the apparently paradoxical combination of the present-time adverb 'now' and the past tense of 'did she feel'. Brinton, like many others, lists the 'co-temporality' of 'the narrative past tense and present and future time deictics' (1980: 366) as a key marker of the style.⁷

The combination of one or more of these 'expressive features', apparently representing the character's point of view, with the third person and past tense of narrative report, has led some critics of free indirect discourse to claim that it promotes a 'dual voice'. Pascal (1977: 26), for example, claims that 'we hear in "style indirect libre" a dual voice, which, through vocabulary, sentence structure, and intonation subtly fuses the two voices of the character and the narrator'. For Pascal, the 'duality' of the style is its key feature, and 'may be heard as a tone of irony, or sympathy, of negation or approval, underlying the statement of the character' (p. 17). This 'dual voice' approach is particularly popular in criticism of the Russian novel. In what Vološinov (1973: 138) terms 'quasi-direct discourse', 'the author's rhetoric and that of the hero begin to overlap: their voices merge; and we get protracted passages that belong simultaneously to the author's narrative and to the hero's internal (though sometimes also external) speech'. The form, he insists, 'does not contain an "either/ or" dilemma; its *specificum* is precisely a matter of *both* author *and* character speaking at the same time' (p. 144). Ginsburg (1982: 135) similarly describes free indirect discourse as a 'completely bivocal utterance'. The style, he claims, 'contains two sets of contradictory signs, one pointing to the speech of the characters and the other toward the narration. These two "voices," as Vološinov has emphasized, coexist in a structure of undecidability (where one cannot opt for either one or the other being the "meaning" of the utterance)' (p. 140).

Yet other narrative critics, especially those coming from a more linguistic perspective, have been sceptical about the notion of 'dual voice'. Banfield (1982: 93) posits the principle of '1 E [Expression]/ 1 SELF', according to which 'for every node E, there is at most one referent, called the "subject of consciousness" or SELF, to whom all expressive elements are attributed'. For her, expressions suggesting a character's point of view in the style she names 'represented speech and thought' 'cannot be simultaneously attributed to a covert or "effaced" narrator. Rather than being narrated, consciousness in this style is represented unmediated by any judging point of view. No one speaks in represented Es, although in them speech may be represented' (pp. 97–8).⁸ Galbraith (1995: 44) is similarly resistant to the notion that 'there must be a narrator who is the source of knowledge and language in the text'. For her, the presence or lack of a speaker or narrator is based on 'specific deictic indicators in a text, rather than on an a priori argument based on an analogy with ordinary human experience' (p. 46), and 'the so-called merging of a narrator with a character can be more adequately described as the absence of a narrator' (p. 54). Galbraith thus rejects the claim that 'the fuzziness

of boundaries between characters' subjective contexts constitutes a case of dual voice, let alone double SELF': 'prolonged confusion about whose consciousness is being followed does not constitute proof that more than one consciousness is being followed at the same time. Rather, at these moments of ambiguity, a SELF exists but is not identifiable' (p. 41). She insists that 'there will always be only one fictional SELF as the Origo of any fictional expression' (p. 54).

Fludernik (1993: 432) opposes the notion of a 'dual voice' in free indirect discourse from a different angle. For her, 'all language, even in free indirect discourse, is the language of the current speaker or text'. Referring to her list of 'expressive features', she acknowledges that 'all the various lexical and syntactic elements that I have presented [...], since they relate to a deictic center and therefore establish a notional subjectivity (a SELF), are usually regarded as evoking a character's voice' (p. 327). However, narrators, she claims, very often 'appropriate' the 'figural idiom' of characters, and are equally capable of employing the 'expressive features'. It therefore makes no linguistic sense to speak of a 'dual voice'. This notion, she insists, 'suffers from a linguistically or methodologically insufficient determination of the status of "voice" [...] as a consequence, it fails to describe textual phenomena with any acceptable precision and ultimately exposes itself to the charge of mere impressionistic dabbling' (p. 351).⁹

However, although she rejects the notion of 'dual voice' on strictly linguistic grounds, Fludernik does admit that this hypothesis 'has [...] been the standard account of free indirect discourse [...] precisely because of readers' *experience* of a dual voice, of an overlapping of the languages of the narrative report and the idiom of characters' discourse' (p. 350). Readers, she says, 'do in fact construct a narrator's voice [...] as a default value and, given sufficient linguistic evidence, experience an evocation of figural voices on that background' (p. 350). Thus the 'expressive features' that Fludernik and others have identified are best regarded as '*signals* deployed intentionally to *evoke* subjectivity rather than a mere surface structure of underlying *actual* consciousness or SELF' (p. 398). She thus shifts her explanation of free indirect discourse to a 'discourse-strategic level' on which the reader picks out 'expressive' elements in order to construct a 'voice', or a 'subjective, deictic center which the reader in the interpretative process identifies as the character's' (p. 440). Thus, a 'dual voice' can indeed be posited to exist '*on a higher level*', the result of 'the reader's pragmatic interpretation of textual elements within their specific literary context' (p. 349). For her, the 'dual voice hypothesis' has '*a cognitive appropriateness to the reading experience*' (p. 439). The experiment detailed below was designed to test this assertion.

3 Types of 'context'

I also attempted to examine this 'interpretative process' further, and investigate exactly what leads readers to 'construct a "voice"'. For Fludernik (1993: 439), much depends on the notion of 'context'. 'Even the clearest deictic signals',

she claims, 'require an appropriate context to establish a reading of (figural) "voice"', and in cases where there are 'no expressive features' she insists on 'the crucial importance of interpretation for the establishment of a free indirect discourse reading' (Fludernik, 1996a: 103). As noted earlier, the second and third sentences of the example from *Pride and Prejudice* suggest a character's point of view even though they contain, in Sanford et al.'s words, 'no direct perspective cues'. Fludernik (1993: 198) notes that there are many such occasions where the separation between the character's language and that of the narrator 'cannot be determined on purely linguistic grounds at all', and that where there is no change in pronoun or tense, for example, 'only the *content* and the *context* of a passage allow the construction of SPEAKER and SELF'. Other critics of the style have agreed; Bronzwaer (1970: 50) also notes that in many cases 'dependence on the context may be the only pointer to free indirect style'. Leech and Short (1981: 338) similarly observe instances in both free indirect speech and free indirect thought in which 'it is impossible to tell by the use of formal linguistic criteria alone whether one is reading the thoughts of the character or the views of the narrator/ author'.

Yet some further consideration is required at this point of what exactly is meant by 'context'. Much recent work in stylistics has sought to expand the range of this problematic term.¹⁰ Critics of point of view have tended to concentrate on the relatively narrow definition of the term: the verbal context, or the co-text. Ehrlich (1990: 17), for example, insists on the relevance of 'discourse context' to the interpretation of point of view, complaining that 'previous accounts of RST [represented speech and thought] have been descriptively inadequate owing to their exclusive consideration of sentence-internal linguistic features'.¹¹ She develops a framework according to which 'sentences that are locally cohesive and/or coherent with previous discourse are shown to be interpreted in a similar fashion in terms of point of view. Conversely, sentences that lack local cohesion and/or coherence with previous discourse are shown to be interpreted differently in terms of point of view' (p. 3). While some attention has thus been paid in studies of free indirect discourse to the influence of the preceding co-text in determining point of view, little notice has been given to the succeeding co-text; to what follows an ambiguous passage.

My concern was therefore to test two interrelated questions. First, whether readers do, as Fludernik suggests, experience a 'dual voice' when reading passages of free indirect discourse, and second, whether their identification of point of view is influenced by the succeeding co-text; by what comes after an ambiguous passage. I designed an experiment that asked subjects to attribute point of view in two ambiguous passages of fictional narrative. I was interested in what led the subjects to their assessments as much as in the assessments themselves, and hence asked them to elaborate briefly on the reasons for their choices. As will become apparent below, these subjective responses were both varied and provocative, offering support for Stockwell's (2002: 2) observation that 'it is in the detail of readings that all the interest and fascination lies'.

4 Experiment

The experiment was carried out on 32 first-year undergraduates at the University of Stirling, all of whom were native speakers of English.¹² All were studying English as one of their three subjects in their first year, though none had any specialist knowledge of free indirect discourse. Each subject was given the same instructions (see Appendix). They were then all asked to read the example quoted earlier from *Pride and Prejudice*, which was presented as follows:

[Elizabeth has just heard about her sister Lydia's elopement with Wickham]
 (1) She had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydia had any partiality for him; but she was convinced that Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to any body. (2) Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. (3) Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object. (4) The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl! – oh! how acutely did she now feel it.

Below the passage, the subjects were asked the following questions:

1. Whose voice is represented *in sentence 4* here?
 - (a) Elizabeth's alone
 - (b) The narrator's alone
 - (c) Both Elizabeth's and the narrator's
 - (d) It is impossible to decide
2. Which features of language led you to select (a), (b), (c) or (d)?

The responses to question 1 were as follows:

- (a) Elizabeth's alone: 14
- (b) The narrator's alone: 4
- (c) Both Elizabeth's and the narrator's: 14
- (d) It is impossible to decide: 0

The first thing to notice is that fewer than half of the respondents claimed to hear a 'dual voice' in sentence 4. An equal number said they heard Elizabeth's 'voice' alone, while 4 subjects said they heard only the narrator. The responses to question 2 were equally varied. Of those who thought they heard a 'dual voice' in sentence 4 and answered (c), one subject wrote that 'Elizabeth is the subject, all the observations are from her point of view but written from the outside', while another proposed that 'while the language of the sentence does not leave the third person, it does abandon the narrator's objectivity of Elizabeth's inner feelings, giving the impression that the narrator is writing Elizabeth's feelings via a strong expression of them'. Of those who answered (b), all observed the use of the third-person pronoun. One wrote that 'while it does tell you what Elizabeth is thinking, it is from outside, the point of view is from the third

person perspective', while another similarly noted that 'there are no first person references such as "I" that lead me to believe Elizabeth is speaking'. Of those subjects who heard the character's voice alone and answered (a), several pointed to the exclamation marks, with one commenting that 'the informal language (exclamation marks, dashes) more represent a person's speech than a narrator's'. More impressionistically, another subject noted that not all the sentences are 'standard' and that the passage therefore 'more closely resembles real thought as it occurs', and another that 'the author appears to be writing Elizabeth's thoughts as they appear in her head.' The variety of responses to both questions 1 and 2 suggests then that some caution is needed for the proposition that the 'dual voice hypothesis' has a 'cognitive appropriateness to the reading experience'.

Subjects were then asked to read a second passage from Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* (1989 [1796]), for reasons that will be explained later. Half (16) were given the following paragraph:

- (1) He [Marchmont] had evaded all explanation on money matters: but there was every reason to suppose he was but slenderly supplied with the means of existence; and it appeared very uncertain, whether on his reaching France it would be possible to make his way across the whole kingdom to the southern coast, where, not far from Toulon, his relation the Baron de Lavergnac resided.
- (2) If he did reach that side of France, from all present intelligence there was too much cause to apprehend that Monsieur de Lavergnac was involved in the general ruin that menaced the royal party, to which he decidedly belonged.

This group was then asked the following questions:

1. Whose point of view is represented in this paragraph?¹³
 - (a) A character's alone
 - (b) The narrator's alone
 - (c) Both a character's and the narrator's
 - (d) It is impossible to decide
2. Which features of language led you to select (a), (b), (c) or (d)?

The other 16 were given both this first paragraph and the short paragraph below, which follows it in the original text:

- (3) With all these apprehensions continually present to her, Althea now tasted no more peace than when she knew Marchmont to be within a hundred paces of her, and to be in momentary danger of being dragged away to end his life in prison.

This group was then asked the following questions:

1. Whose point of view is represented in the first paragraph here?
 - (a) Althea's alone
 - (b) The narrator's alone

- (c) Both Althea's and the narrator's
- (d) It is impossible to decide

2. Which features of language led you to select (a), (b), (c) or (d)?

My hypothesis was that those subjects who read both paragraphs would be more likely to assign the first paragraph to either Althea's point of view alone (a), or to her point of view combined with the narrator's (c). Though the words 'it appeared very uncertain' hint at the possibility of a subjective perspective, it is hard to discern any clear, definite evidence of a character's point of view on the basis of the first paragraph alone. The start of the second paragraph, 'With all these apprehensions continually present to her' would seem to indicate clearly that it is Althea who is worrying about Marchmont's future in the first paragraph. The results were as follows:

- Those with 1 paragraph only:
 - (a) A character's point of view alone: 1
 - (b) The narrator's alone: 9
 - (c) Both a character's and the narrator's: 3
 - (d) It is impossible to decide: 3
- Those with both paragraphs:
 - (a) Althea's point of view alone: 4
 - (b) The narrator's alone: 4
 - (c) Both Althea's and the narrator's: 6
 - (d) It is impossible to decide: 2

As with the first passage, there was a wide range of responses, though the initial hypothesis was confirmed: only four of the 16 readers of the single paragraph detected a character's point of view, whereas 10 of the 16 who read the second paragraph as well thought Althea's point of view was present in the first paragraph, either alone, or in combination with the narrator's. Again, question 2 also provoked a variety of responses. Of those subjects who read just the one paragraph and went for (b), the narrator's point of view alone, one wrote that 'the tone is formal, and the text tends towards bold statement of fact', while another observed that the paragraph involves 'more fact and less opinion' and that it 'seemed to be too "all-knowing" to be a character's view'. Of the three subjects who were unable to decide whose point of view was present on the basis of the single paragraph, one commented that 'because I don't know which context this is to be taken in, would need to read what preceded this section to decide', and another that 'if there was a larger passage could possibly decide'. Of those who read both paragraphs and went for (a), Althea's point of view alone, one subject simply quoted 'With all these apprehensions continually present to her'. Of those who detected both Althea's point of view and the narrator's, and chose (c), one noted that the word "'these'" hints these ideas have been going through Althea's mind', while another drew an arrow to the first paragraph and wrote 'if only this paragraph it is just the narrator!'

Similarly, one subject who read both paragraphs and was unable to decide whose point of view was present in the first commented that 'if the 2nd paragraph was not there I would have definitely thought it was the narrator'.

5 Discussion

These results reveal the possible significance of what comes after an ambiguous passage in the judging of point of view. They suggest that any model for tracking the interpretation of psychological perspective will need to be flexible enough to accommodate the possibility of back-tracking.¹⁴ This would seem to confirm Sanford's (2002: 203) view that 'flexibility in the utilisation of processing resources is of paramount importance in resource-limited systems like the human mind'. Emmott (1997: viii) similarly shows how readers of narrative fiction need to keep 'updating' their mental representations of the fictional world to match what she calls its 'dynamic development'. According to her, 'the reader is actively involved in constructing and updating contextual knowledge at the same time as focusing on the events which are happening within that context' (p. 18). She allows for the possibility that linguistic signals can force readers to reappraise their mental representations of a text which they have just read, noting that 'the ability not only to make assumptions about a context but to realize that these assumptions may need adjusting is an important feature of human cognition' (p. 162). A similar point is made by Galbraith (1995: 40), who reports that in her reading of a passage from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) 'I had to double back several times to figure out whose consciousness was being represented'. She observes that:

the characterization of a passage as objective is never absolute in real-time immersed reading. There are absolute linguistic cues, such as exclamations and curses, that a context is not objective, but a sentence that has none of these cues may nevertheless turn out, in retrospect, to be part of a subjective context if a later sentence recontextualizes the objective content within the consciousness of a SELF. (Galbraith, 1995: 52)

Something like this dynamic, developmental view of text processing could very usefully be applied to studies of point of view, where approaches have too often been blinkered by a very linear model of reading.¹⁵

Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* was chosen for the second part of the experiment because it is particularly packed with delayed markers of point of view, which invite the reader to 'double back' and 'recontextualize' previous sentences. Examples (apart from 'With all these apprehensions continually present to her') include: 'Notwithstanding all this reasoning' (vol. II, p. 32), 'Rapidly these ideas passed through her mind' (vol. II, p. 106), 'Tormented and perplexed by these thoughts' (vol. II, p. 149), 'All these thoughts passed with rapidity through her mind' (vol. II, p. 205), 'Busied in these conjectures' (vol. III, p. 153),

‘Overwhelmed with these tormenting fears’ (vol. IV, p. 129) and ‘Althea was conscious of all this’ (vol. IV, p. 190). One possible explanation for the large number of such delayed markers in this novel is that it was written at a time when the style known later as free indirect thought was in its infancy. Most critics have identified the early 19th century, and Austen’s novels in particular, as the moment when this style emerged in the English novel. Pascal (1977: 24), for example, claims that when ‘style indirect libre’ ‘first appears as a prominent and continuous feature in a novel, in Goethe and Jane Austen, it is already used with the greatest skill and propriety’, while Gard (1992: 56) describes ‘that flickering and subtle immediacy in representation of consciousness’ as ‘one of Jane Austen’s great gifts to the English novel’. Though Austen may indeed be the first English novelist to employ free indirect thought ‘continuously’, the style can be found in the 18th century too, and indeed earlier.¹⁶ It appears, for example, in the novels of Charlotte Smith, which we know Austen read.¹⁷ However, extended passages are not as frequent as in Austen, and characters’ thoughts are usually either introduced explicitly or, as in the above examples, identified later as such. The fact that there are so many delayed markers of point of view in *Marchmont* in particular may reflect a lack of confidence in using free indirect thought on the part of the author; though Althea’s consciousness is prominent in the novel, it is rarely left completely unattributed.

Consider too this example. Wansford, Althea’s servant, has found out that she has given some money to Marchmont:

(1) At the mention of this Althea thought she saw all those half-formed suspicions arise in the mind of Wansford, which she was so unwilling he should harbour. (2) He found it difficult to imagine, that a young lady or any other person would give their money without some particular liking to those on whom it was bestowed. (3) Of that interest which compassion for his singular situation, or mere friendship, could raise in his favour, Wansford was incapable of forming any notion. (4) Whatever were his ideas, he endeavoured carefully to conceal them, and told Althea that he thought he could, by means of Mrs. Mosely, convey to Marchmont whatever he desired, without his knowing from whence it came. (vol. II, pp. 177–8)

The provenance of sentences 2 and 3 here is ambiguous between Wansford’s views (as reported by the narrator), and Althea’s views of Wansford’s views. Though the first sentence might lead us to suspect that what follows are her impressions of what is passing through his mind, the evidence is not decisive. Until, that is, the reader comes to sentence 4. ‘Whatever were his ideas’ makes it clear that the narrator has not been offering us an insight into what Wansford thinks. Instead sentences 2 and 3 must be Althea’s interpretation of what he is thinking. Again it is only *after* the ambiguous sentences that the reader is given a clue as to their probable point of view. Again sentence 4 has the effect of encouraging him or her to re-read and re-interpret the previous sentences.

6 Conclusion

Some lines of further inquiry have been opened up in response to the two initial, interrelated questions:¹⁸

Do readers construct a 'dual voice'?

The experiment suggests the need for some scepticism here. Fludernik's claim that 'readers do in fact construct a narrator's voice [...] as a default value and, given sufficient linguistic evidence, experience an evocation of figural voices on that background', and that in such cases 'readers *experience* a dual voice' needs to be treated with caution. This experience may belong to a very small, specialized group of readers; those who are familiar with free indirect discourse. The preliminary evidence from this test suggests that readers in fact respond in very varied, diverse ways to passages of ambiguous point of view.

How is point of view identified?

The experiment suggests that what comes after an ambiguous passage of narrative may sometimes be as important as what comes before it. The fact that point of view can be signalled after the event implies that the processes of reappraisal and recontextualization may in fact be much more common in the reading of narrative fiction than has been supposed. Alternatively, readers may be able to keep in mind more than one possible interpretation of an ambiguous passage and wait for some reasonably decisive evidence before deciding on the point of view represented in it. In Emmott's words, 'the text may force a reader to reinterpret a stretch of narrative or to hold two different interpretations simultaneously' (p. 164). Her insight that 'in general, narrative processing is, on many occasions, more a matter of weighing probabilities than of decoding a text by a process of rule application and deduction' (p. 174) could usefully be extended to theoretical discussions of fictional point of view. Rather than a 'fusion' of the narrator's and character's voices in free indirect discourse then, perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of a balance of two perspectives in ambiguous passages of narrative, which can sometimes be resolved one way or the other by subsequent linguistic cues. In other cases, the ambiguity may never be resolved and both points of view may remain in play.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to two anonymous readers for *Language and Literature* for their constructive comments on an earlier version of this article.

Notes

- 1 For a useful introduction to both see Stockwell (2002), and for cognitive poetics/ stylistics in action see Semino and Culpeper (2002) and Gavins and Steen (2003).
- 2 See also Ludwig and Faulstich (1985), Schram (1985), Andringa (1986) and László (1986).
- 3 See for example Hewitt (1995) and Li and Zubin (1995).
- 4 See also Sanford (2002).
- 5 See especially Pascal (1977), Cohn (1978) and Fludernik (1993).
- 6 Useful summaries of the form and function of free indirect discourse are provided in Leech and Short (1981: 324–51), Toolan (1988: 122–45) and Short (1996: 288–325).
- 7 Many other ‘expressive features’, or indications of the character’s perspective in free indirect discourse have been identified; see especially Fludernik’s chapter on ‘Indirect and free indirect discourse: deictic features and expressivity’ (1993: 227–279).
- 8 For a spirited rebuttal of Banfield, see McHale (1983).
- 9 Galbraith similarly observes that “‘voice” is a poor synonym for SELF, because a voice is a public behaviour that may be referred to the SELF or Origo of a HEARER as easily as to a SPEAKER. A mimic’s use of another’s voice is based, not on his or her merging with another’s subjectivity, but on his or her ability to hear and reproduce. A double voice does not equal a double SELF’ (1995: 54).
- 10 See for example Bex et al. (2000), Verdonk and Weber (1995) and Carter and Simpson (1989).
- 11 ‘Represented Speech and Thought’ (RST) is Ehrlich’s (and Banfield’s) term for free indirect discourse.
- 12 An earlier version of this experiment was conducted, on a much smaller scale, at Northern Arizona University in April 2003. Eleven subjects only were tested. This earlier experiment served as a trial run for the later one detailed in this essay; not only was the number of subjects increased, but the overall design was improved.
- 13 In the first part of the experiment the subjects were asked to identify ‘voice’, as I was testing the ‘dual voice’ hypothesis. However, both anonymous readers of an earlier version of this essay (based on the original, smaller-scale experiment) pointed out that the term ‘voice’ might have led the subjects towards more character-based interpretations of the ambiguous passages. In the questions for the second part of the larger experiment I therefore switched to the more neutral term ‘point of view’.
- 14 Compare Wiebe (1994). She notes that her algorithm, designed to ‘track point of view on the basis of regularities found’ (p. 233), operates in a linear fashion: ‘the algorithm does not revise its decision as to whether a sentence is subjective in the light of later sentences’ (p. 263).
- 15 See also Fludernik (1996b: 594–99) and Gerrig (1993: 90–6).
- 16 See for example Adamson (1994) (on Puritan narratives), Fludernik (1996a) (on Behn), and Bray (2003) (on the epistolary novel).
- 17 See Pearson (1999: 144, 146).
- 18 This experiment would need to be replicated and/ or conducted on a larger scale for the conclusions to be in any way definitive. The nature of the informants could also be varied; there are potential problems with using only students as subjects. Both academics and non-academic, maturer readers could usefully be tested in an expanded version of the experiment.

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Appendix

Instructions given to all subjects:

This reading experiment is designed to test how point of view affects the reading process. You will be asked to read two short passages *once only* and answer the questions below each. For each passage there will be two questions; the first is multiple-choice and has four possible answers. Please circle *one* of these. The second question in each case asks you to elaborate on your reasons for your answer to the first question, inviting you to identify the features of language which led you to your selection. Please write down *on the page itself* the crucial features on which you based your choice. You do not need to write in full sentences or be exhaustive and should not spend more than 5 minutes on the whole exercise.

Please note that for each of the questions there is no 'right' answer. Different readers will respond differently, and I am interested in the reasons you give for your selections.

Both passages are examples of fictional prose. The first passage (passage A) is taken from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Passage B is taken from Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont* (1796).

To aid you in your answers I have numbered the sentences in each passage; these numbers obviously do not appear in the original. This experiment is not designed to be difficult and may stimulate some thoughts about the representation of point of view in narrative. Thank you for your time in reading these passages and answering the questions.