**Mind Style 25 years on**

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**Introduction**

Chapter 6 of Leech and Short's *Style in Fiction* was devoted to the notion of "mind style", which had been introduced four years earlier by Roger Fowler in order to capture "any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self" ("Linguistics and the Novel" 103). In this paper I consider the extent of Leech and Short's contribution to the development of the concept of mind style, and then go on to show how the study of mind style, and of fictional minds more generally, has developed over the last 25 years in both narratology and stylistics. I consider particularly the relevance of cognitive stylistics/poetics, pragmatics, and corpus linguistics to the study of mind in fiction, and suggest some possible directions for future research. I finish with a few reflections on some issues of terminology in the area of "mind style" and related phenomena.

**Mind Style in *Style in Fiction***

Leech and Short's discussion of mind style is based on a fundamental distinction between a (fictional) "world" and a "world view":

> the fictional world is *what* is apprehended, whereas our present concern is with *how* that world is apprehended, or conceptualized. (187)

Leech and Short go on to state that they will adopt Fowler's term "mind style" in preference to "world view" and provide a quotation from Fowler that spells out how mind styles are projected via systematic linguistic and textual patterns:

> [c]umulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another, give rise to an impression of a world-view, what I shall call a "mind style." ("Linguistics and the Novel" 76)

The rest of Leech and Short's chapter develops Fowler's original intuition and application in a number of significant ways.

First, Leech and Short point out that the notion of mind style can be applied at all levels of what they later call the "discourse structure" of novels (263ff.), so that it is possible to study the mind styles of authors, narrators and characters. They also note that, in

principle at least, the concept of mind style potentially applies to all texts, since "even in apparently normal pieces of writing, the writer slants us towards a particular "mental set" (188). This leads Leech and Short to demonstrate the possibility of a cline "from mind styles which can easily strike a reader as natural and uncontrived […], to those which clearly impose an unorthodox conception of the fictional world" (188-9).

The need to focus on how systematic linguistic choices reflect the workings of individual minds becomes increasingly more obvious as Leech and Short move towards the "unorthodox" end of the cline. As Short has subsequently noted, "the more normal the choices become, the less force the mind-style concept tends to have" (2505). Indeed, Leech and Short devote the final section of their chapter to the opening of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, which is narrated by Benjy, who is mentally retarded. This is the first part of the extract analysed by Leech and Short:

> Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming towards where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass. (qtd. in Leech and Short 203)

Benjy is watching a game of golf, but this is not immediately obvious from his description of what he sees. Leech and Short discuss in detail the variety of linguistic patterns that are used to convey Benjy's uncomprehending view of an event that is likely to be familiar to most readers, so that readers are likely to (a) experience some degree of confusion on a first reading, and (b) conclude that Benjy has some kind of cognitive limitation (even before this is made explicit in the narrative itself). Leech and Short show that this is achieved, first and foremost, by the simplicity, idiosyncrasies and limitations of Benjy's lexis and syntax. They also point out some oddities in Benjy's use of pronouns, and generally in the way in which his narrative fails to distinguish explicitly between old and new information, and between major and minor information.

All in all, however, Benjy's narrative does not simply convey an impression of a somewhat limited mind, but also a potentially poetic sense of the freshness of reality when observed through a mind who lacks our normal categories and rationality:

> [t]he poetry is particularly noticeable in phrases like "between the curling flower spaces" and "a bird slanting and tilting". With its childlike vision, such language borders on poetry in recapturing a pristine awareness of things. (Leech and Short 207)

In my view, Leech and Short's analysis of Benjy's mind style has stood the test of time (see also the later analyses in Fowler "Linguistic Criticism" and Bockting). However, subsequent developments in stylistics and narratology have added to our understanding of

the phenomena that are captured by the notion of mind style, both in terms of relevant linguistic patterns and their interpretation, and in terms of the place of "fictional minds" in the study of prose fiction. Most subsequent work on mind style, however, has focused on the minds of characters or first-person narrators such as Benjy, since, as Leech and Short point out "[c]haracters" mind styles are more readily discernible as odd" and

> [n]ovels which have a narrator or reflector who is differentiated from the author
> […] also allow the possibility of a more positive invitation to perceive a particular
> mind style as deviant. (202)

In the rest of this paper I will focus specifically on developments and potential new directions in the study of fictional minds, including both characters and character/narrators.

**Fictional minds in contemporary narratology**

Arguably, one of the main attractions of reading fiction is that it can give us a convincing and involving impression of what it is like to be somebody else – to do, feel and think things that are not part of our own personal experience. More specifically, a crucial part of the suspension of disbelief that is associated with the reading of fiction is the possibility of accessing directly the minds of characters, primarily when a third-person, omniscient narrator tells us about characters' mental events or allows us to "listen in" to what a character is thinking (see Cohn; Hamburger; Lodge).[1]

In recent years, the notions of mind and consciousness have become increasingly central to the concerns of narratologists, and have been included within several influential definitions of narrative fiction itself. Fludernik (12), for example, defines "narrativity" in terms of "experientiality", and goes on to add:

> since humans are conscious human beings, (narrative) experientiality always
> implies – and sometimes emphatically foregrounds – the  protagonist's
> consciousness. (30)

Fludernik acknowledges that the centrality of consciousness in her theory of narrative is closely related to the prominence of the representation of consciousness in 20th century fiction, and goes as far as saying that, in her view, narrative only came to full maturity when 20th century novelists began to foreground consciousness in their writing (27).

In a book entitled *Fictional Minds*, Palmer also views the representation of characters' minds as central to the definition and study of narrative fiction:

> narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning.
> [...] If I am right, then it follows that the study of the novel is the study of fictional
> mental functioning and also that the task of the theorist is to make explicit the
> various means by which this phenomenon is studied and analyzed. (5)

For Palmer, the notion of "mind" includes "all aspects of our inner life", namely not just prototypically cognitive activities such as thinking and perceiving, but also "dispositions, feelings, beliefs and emotions" ("Fictional Minds" 19). In Palmer's view, understanding a narrative crucially involves the reconstruction of the functioning of the minds of characters, which enables us to make sense of actions and events. This, he argues, is not just essential to the reading of typically introspective narratives such as 20th century modernist novels, but to the reading of narrative generally, including prototypically behaviourist narratives such as Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (see also Zunshine).

Margolin adopts from Palmer ("Mind Beyond the Skin") the notion of "cognitive mental functioning", and goes on to show its relevance to the study of the minds of authors, implied authors, narrators, and characters, as Leech and Short did with Fowler's notion of mind style. Indeed, Margolin's notion of "cognitive style" appears to be roughly equivalent to mind style, since it is defined as "a tendency to process information in a particular way which constitutes an interface between cognition and personality" (277). Crucially, Margolin regards the provision of unrestricted access to the minds of characters as a "constitutive convention" of literary narratives (282), and argues that, by being exposed to the functioning of fictional minds, readers can enrich their understanding of the human condition, and of their own personal experiences.

Importantly for the topic of this paper, Margolin (287) notes a "preference of much literature for nonstandard forms of cognitive functioning, be they rare or marginal, deviant, or involving a failure, breakdown, or lack of standard patterns", and adds that

> [t]he fictional presentation of cognitive mechanisms in action, especially of their own breakdown and failure, is itself a powerful cognitive tool which may make us aware of actual cognitive mechanisms, and, more specifically, of our own mental functioning. (278)

Margolin also raises the question of what constitutes the kind of "standard", "normal" mental functioning that is taken as benchmark for regarding particular minds as non-standard or abnormal. Here, he argues, both writers and readers tend to rely on "folk psychology", namely socially shared models of the workings of both "normal" and "abnormal" minds. Nonetheless, like Palmer and many other contemporary narratologists and stylisticians (e.g. Herman; Semino and Culpeper), Margolin argues that concepts and categories from cognitive science have much to contribute to the study of fiction generally and of fictional minds in particular. This applies both to the description of the minds of characters and, more obviously, to the description of how readers interpret literature and attribute minds and mental lives to characters.

## Cognitive stylistics and mind style

Much recent work in stylistics has involved the integration of linguistic analysis with a range of theories of cognition, under the labels "cognitive stylistics" or "cognitive poetics" (Stockwell; Semino and Culpeper; Gavins and Steen). This has led to advances in the study of a range of fictional phenomena (e.g. text worlds, characterisation),

including the study of fictional minds and the characteristics that readers attribute to them (see Bockting for the application of psychiatry and psychoanalysis to the study of mind style, in an approach she labels "psychostylistics"). In this section I will focus particularly on how schema theory and cognitive metaphor theory can be applied to the study of mind style.

### *Schemata and mind style*

As I mentioned earlier, the role of lexical choices and patterns in the projection of mind style has been emphasized and described in the early work of both Fowler and Leech and Short. Fowler, in particular, spells out the crucial assumption that the lack of a particular lexical item from an individual's repertoire suggests that that individual lacks the relevant concept ("Linguistic Criticism" 152). If an individual appears to lack lexical items that are normally shared amongst speakers of a particular language, he or she exhibits what Fowler calls "underlexicalization", and readers will have to infer some explanation as to why that individual's repertoire of lexical items and associated concepts is more limited than what they regard to be the "norm". In the extract from *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, Benjy uses general terms or circumlocutions (e.g. *table*, *flower tree*), where more specific ones would normally be expected. This is one of the phenomena that leads readers to the inference that Benjy has some kind of mental impairment.

The analysis of narratives such as Benjy's can be taken one step further by applying the notions of "schema" or "frame", which have been developed in cognitive psychology to refer to "an organized packet of information about the world, events, or people, stored in long-term memory" (Eysenck and Keane 531, 536). According to schema theory, comprehension requires that the comprehender *both* possesses *and* activates the schema or schemata that are appropriate to the text or experience they are involved with. This was famously demonstrated in an experiment by Bransford and Johnson which involved the following passage:

> The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange items into different groups. Of course one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step; otherwise, you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do few things at once than too many. In the short run it may not seem important but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first, the whole procedure may seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity of this task in the near future, but then, one can never tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the material into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will have to be repeated. However, that is part of life. (722)

The group of informants who were read out the passage in this form rated it as incomprehensible and had difficulties recalling it. In contrast, the group who were given a title ("Washing clothes") before being exposed to the text rated it as highly

comprehensible and found it easy to recall. This can be explained as a result of the fact that, without the title, the passage does not contain any explicit references to washing and clothes, which would function as triggers or "headers" for the activation of the relevant schema. Hence, the first group of informants could not activate the schema even though they had it potentially available.

There are some interesting similarities between the (artificially constructed) "Washing clothes" passage and fictional extracts such as the one from *The Sound and the Fury*. In Bransford and Johnson's passage, generic terms (e.g. *procedure*, *items*) or circumlocutions (e.g. *their appropriate places*) are used instead of the appropriate, more specific terms that would normally function as headers, such as "washing", "clothes" and "wardrobe". What is lacking, of course, is any interpretative significance beyond the researchers' goal to "trick" their informants in order to test their hypotheses. However, schema theory can usefully explain why passages such as the one from Benjy's narrative are initially difficult to understand, and lead readers to the conclusion that they are being presented with minds that differ from their own in terms of background knowledge and cognitive abilities.

The kind of vocabulary used in Benjy's narrative lacks many of the terms that would normally function as headers for the activation of the relevant GOLF schema in the readers'' minds (e.g. *tee* or *round of golf*). On a first reading, this is likely to delay the activation of the schema itself, a phenomenon that Margolin calls "frame-blocking":

> the author has *to prevent (block) the reader from activating his or her pertinent categories of world or literary knowledge* and applying them to the textual fragment in question in order to identify the persons, situations, or events portrayed in it. (277; emphasis in original)

Frame-blocking results in the (usually temporary) incomprehension and confusion that many readers experience when reading passages such as the extract from *The Sound and the Fury* for the first time. However, in fiction this kind of phenomenon normally has greater interpretative and aesthetic consequences than in psychological experiments. On the one hand, readers will have to find an explanation as to why they have been presented with an opaque description of a familiar action or event. In cases such as the extract above, readers are likely to conclude that the first-person narrator (or focalizing character) lacks the relevant background knowledge, and therefore does not fully understand what they are seeing. This in turn leads to further inferences about why the narrator or character lacks the relevant schema (as well as the ability to become consciously aware of this lack), resulting in the conclusion that the narrator is mentally retarded, a pre-historic human being, a child, or whatever (see Margolin 278). On the other hand, as Margolin also points out, the delay caused by frame-blocking results in the kind of slowed-down perception that the Russian Formalists saw as characteristic of literature, and that has potentially defamiliarising effects:

> [t]he purpose of the defamiliarization technique is to render unfamiliar that which is already familiar to a certain actual readership possessing, together with the

author himself or herself, a set of culturally established and shared schemata (frames, scripts, scenarios) adequate for the mental categorization and representation of the phenomenon in question. (277)

In other words, the notion of frame-blocking can explain both the perception of a nonstandard mind style and the aesthetic effects that Leech and Short have described as "recapturing a pristine awareness of things" (207; see also Fowler "Linguistic Criticism" 153).

## *Metaphor and mind style*

The linguistic phenomena considered by Fowler and Leech and Short in relation to mind style also include choices in figurative language, and particularly the consistent use of personification to convey, for example, a heightened perception of nature as a conscious, living being (Leech and Short 199; see also Fowler "Linguistics and the Novel" 108ff.). The development of Cognitive Metaphor theory in the intervening decades (Lakoff and Johnson) has provided a fertile environment in which to consider the role of metaphorical patterns in the projection of mind style (see Black; Semino and Swindlehurst; Semino "Cognitive Stylistic Approach to Mind Style" and "Blending and Characters' Mental Functioning").

The central claim in Cognitive Metaphor theory is that pervasive patterns of conventional metaphorical expressions in language (e.g. *I need a change of direction in my life*) reflect conventional patterns of metaphorical thought, known as conceptual metaphors (e.g. LIFE IS A JOURNEY). Conceptual metaphors involve systematic sets of correspondences between a source conceptual domain (e.g. JOURNEY) and a target conceptual domain (e.g. LIFE), and typically enable us to make sense of abstract, complex, or poorly delineated experiences (such as time and emotions) in terms of more concrete, simple and well delineated experiences (such as movement in space or containers).

In considering the use of metaphorical patterns in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kate Swindlehurst and I made the following point:

> whereas cognitive theorists have highlighted the relationship between conventional metaphors and the world view of a particular culture, we explore the way in which consistent and nonconventional metaphorical patterns within a particular text reflect the conceptual system of its creator (or, in the case of Kesey's novel, its first person narrator). We suggest that, at an individual level, the systematic use of a particular metaphor (or metaphors) reflects an idiosyncratic cognitive habit, a personal way of making sense of and talking about the world: in other words, a particular mind style. (Semino and Swindlehurst 147)

More recently, Kövecses has suggested that, while there are metaphorical patterns that are widely shared by speakers of the same language, metaphor use may also vary from person to person, due to differences in personal interests and autobiographical experiences. A number of studies have shown how idiosyncratic patterns of metaphor use

can be exploited in a variety of ways by fictional authors to convey a sense of the individual world view and cognitive habits of a particular character.

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, for example, Bromden's first-person narration is characterized by the presence of metaphorical expressions drawn from the source domain of MACHINERY. These expression are used more frequently and more creatively than is normally the case with conventional machine metaphors (e.g. *I'm running out of steam* or *I don't want to throw a spanner in the works*). For example, Bromden describes society as *the Combine* (and allusion to combine harvesters), the mental hospital where he is a patient as *a factory for the Combine [...] for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches*, and the group of patients he belongs to as *machines with flaws inside that can't be repaired*. In Semino and Swindlehurst, we argued that Bromden's use of metaphor plays a central role in the projection of his mind style, and particularly of his conceptualisation of reality, his cognitive habits, and ultimately the mental illness that afflicts him. In the course of the narrative, it becomes clear that the prominence of the MACHINERY source domain in Bromden's mind is due both to his professional expertise as an electrician, and to a salient personal experience (the mental breakdown that brought him to the mental hospital occurred during an air raid in World War 2). The prominent and frequent use of mechanical metaphors in the novel can be interpreted as a reflection of Bromden's cognitive habits and limitations, since he appears to use his knowledge of machinery to compensate for his lack of understanding of other areas of experience, notably people's minds and emotions (including his own), and society at large.

Similar considerations about the connections between patterns of metaphorical expressions and cognitive limitations or mental illness have been made in relation to Lok in *The Inheritors* (Black), Clegg in John Fowles's *The Collector* (Semino "Cognitive Stylistics Approach to Mind Style") and Rosalind in Virginia Woolf's "Lappin and Lapinova" (Semino "Blending and Characters' Mental Functioning"). I have also recently pointed out how authors may exploit differences in metaphor use to convey differences between the mind styles of different characters within the same novel. This is the case, for example, in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and in Joanne Harris's *Chocolat*, where the contrast between, respectively, different characters and different first-person narrators is partly expressed through their contrasting metaphors. In Dickens's novel, for example, the different world views and cognitive habits of different characters are partly conveyed via idiosyncratic uses of metaphor, such as Mr Bounderby's social "ladder", Mrs Sparsit's "staircase" and Stephen's "muddle" (see Semino "Metaphor and Fictional Minds"). In such cases the presence of striking and idiosyncratic metaphorical patterns does not indicate mental illness, but rather conveys a character's preoccupations, evaluations and habitual ways of conceptualizing reality.

A slightly different type of relationship between metaphor and mind style can be found in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The novel's first person narrator, Christopher Boone, is fifteen years old and has a disorder that is normally identified (including by the author himself) as Asperger's syndrome: a form of autism whose sufferers typically have problems with communication, social relationships

and imagination, even though they have near-normal language development and average-to-high levels of intelligence. Haddon's book has received a number of prestigious literary prizes, and has been praised particularly for providing a perceptive and realistic representation of the mind of an individual with Asperger's syndrome. However, Haddon has often stated that the book is neither based on research nor on extensive direct experience with Asperger's sufferers, and that his aim was not to make Christopher "medically correct", but rather a "believable" and "empathetic" character (http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1137378,00.html).

Throughout his narrative, Christopher often consciously reflects on his own difficulties and peculiarities, including the problems he has understanding other people's use of metaphor:

> The second main reason [why Christopher finds people confusing] is that people often talk using metaphors. These are examples of metaphors
>
> **I laughed my socks off.**
> **He was the apple of her eye.**
> **They had a skeleton in the cupboard.**
> **We had a real pig of a day.**
> **The dog was stone dead.**
>
> […]
> I think it [metaphor] should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards. (Haddon 19-20; emphasis in original)

This explicit metalinguistic observation is supported by a few episodes in the novel where Christopher fails to understand metaphorical expressions of the kind mentioned in the extract above, such as *I'm going to hit the hay* and *It's brass monkeys out there*. In contrast, Christopher explicitly approves of simile, because, unlike metaphor, it *is not a lie* (22), and indeed often uses complex similes in his narrative, especially when trying to express the workings of his own mind.

Interestingly, the examples of metaphorical expressions that Haddon uses to illustrate Christopher's difficulties tend to be rather opaque metaphorical idioms (e.g. *apple of her eye*, *brass monkeys*), which readers can easily perceive as metaphorical and as potentially confusing. The fact that Christopher reports several instances of communicative problems due to the use of these expressions provides sufficient systematicity for readers to gain a convincing sense that he has a problem with metaphor. Similarly, his reflections on similes foreground the difference between metaphors and explicit comparisons such as similes, and justify Christopher's ability to use simile in a sophisticated and often highly conscious way, as in the extract below:

> He was asking too many questions and he was asking them too quickly. They were stacking up in my head like loaves in the factory where Uncle Terry works. The factory is a bakery and he operates the slicing machines. And sometimes the

slicer is not working fast enough but the bread keeps coming and there is a blockage. I sometimes think of my mind as a machine, but not always as a bread-slicing machine. It makes it easier to explain to other people what is going on inside it. (Haddon 8)

Not surprisingly, however, the representation of Christopher's relationship with figurative language is not guided by medical research on autism generally and Asperger's syndrome in particular (e.g. Happé; Norbury), nor is it consistent throughout the novel. For example, Christopher both understands and uses not just many conventional metaphorical expressions such as *stay out of other people's business*, but also more novel expressions such as *detach one's mind at will* (which he read in one of his favourite Sherlock Holmes novels). In other words, Haddon brilliantly exploits both the folk psychological notion that autistic people have problems with metaphor,[2] and a folk linguistic view of metaphor as a salient and creative use of language which involves stating something that is obviously untrue. As a consequence, he achieves his goal of making Christopher "believable" without attempting to achieve accuracy in medical terms or complete consistency in terms of the linguistic characteristics of the narrative. While, as Fowler and Leech and Short stated, the projection of mind style does require some degree of systematicity in the use of particular linguistic patterns, this systematicity does not need to be perfect and complete in order to achieve realism (see also Hoover). In fact, complete systematicy (as well as medical accuracy) would often be incompatible with comprehensibility, and with the creation of empathy and aesthetic effects.


**Pragmatics and mind style**

The study of mind style, and of fictional minds generally, has tended to focus on stretches of narration from first-person narratives or third-person narratives that are focalized through a particular character (e.g. Lok in *The Inheritors*). However, any part of the narrative that allows inferences on the workings of a character's mind is potentially relevant to the study of mind style, including particularly the presentation of a character's conversational behaviour, especially through the use of direct speech (see Fanlo Piniés and Semino "Mind Style") .

In chapter 9 of *Style in Fiction*, Leech and Short provide a pioneering discussion of the study of conversation in the novel by exploiting newly developed notions from the philosophy of language and, to a lesser degree, conversation analysis. Over the last quarter of a century, pragmatics and conversation analysis have developed into central areas of linguistics, and have been increasingly exploited by stylisticians in the analysis of fictional conversations, particularly in plays (e.g. Culpeper, Short and Verdonk). This work is primarily concerned with how readers (or theatre audiences) infer characters" goals, attitudes and desires from the utterances they produce. Although the focus of these studies tends to be on characters' deliberate and intentional communicative strategies, some attention has also been paid to inferences that can be drawn from aspects of characters' conversational behaviour that the individual character is not, we conclude, consciously aware of (e.g. Leech and Short 304-5). I would argue that salient and

systematic patterns in a character's communicative behaviour can often lead to inferences about the peculiar workings of that character's mind, especially when these behaviours can be interpreted as non-deliberate.

In the rest of this section, I return to Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and show how notions from pragmatics in particular can be applied to the analysis of Christopher's communicative behaviour in order to account for some of the salient characteristics that readers are likely to attribute to him.

### Grice's maxims  and mind style

Given that autism, and Asperger's syndrome in particular, are typically associated with difficulties in social relationships and communication, it is not surprising that, in *The Curious Incident*, Christopher's communicative behaviour includes a number of salient features, which readers are likely to interpret as a reflection of his condition. These salient characteristics are partly to do with lexical and grammatical patterns, and partly with aspects of communication that can be captured by Grice's Cooperative Principle.

The extract below occurs early in the novel, and helps to establish a sense of Christopher's peculiarities in communication, both as a narrator and as a character. While wandering out at night, Christopher has discovered the dead body of his next-door neighbour's dog, with a fork sticking out of its stomach. Distraught, Christopher has entered his neighbour's garden to pick up the dog. The neighbour, Mrs Shears, has found Christopher holding the dog, and has called the police. The passage below is the beginning of Christopher's account of the arrival of the police:

> Then the police arrived. I like the police. They have uniforms and numbers and you know what they are meant to be doing. There was a policewoman and a policeman. The policewoman had a little hole in her tights on her left ankle and a red scratch in the middle of the hole. The policeman had a big orange leaf stuck to the bottom of his shoe which was poking out from one side.
> The policewoman put her arms round Mrs Shears and led her back towards the house.
> I lifted my head off the grass.
> The policeman squatted down beside me and said, "Would you like to tell me what's going on here, young man?"
> I sat up and said, "The dog is dead."
> "I'd got that far," he said.
> I said, "I think someone killed the dog."
> "How old are you?" he asked.
> I replied, "I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days.

(Haddon 7)

Apart from the relative simplicity of Christopher's lexis and grammar, the passage shows, I would argue, that he has difficulties providing information at the level of detail that would normally be expected from a fifteen-year old. As a narrator, he describes some

minute characteristics of the police officers' legs that are not required in context (a hole in the tight, a leaf stuck under a shoe), and that will not turn out to be relevant to any subsequent developments in the plot (unlike what normally happens in detective stories when descriptions appear to be unnecessarily detailed). As a character, his answers to the policeman's questions are either uninformative (*"The dog is dead"*, *"I think someone killed the dog"*) or too informative (*"I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days"*).

In Gricean terms, Christopher seems to have difficulties with the maxims of quantity and relation, as formulated below.

> The category of Quantity relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims:
>
> 1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
> 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Grice 26)
>
> Under the category of Relation I place a single maxim, namely "Be relevant." (Grice 27)

However, the ways in which Christopher provides irrelevant and inadequate information, both as a character and as a narrator, are nonetheless informative for the reader, as they lead to inferences about *why* he behaves like this (and not just in the above extract, but consistently, or consistently enough, throughout the novel). Readers are likely to conclude that Christopher's communicative behaviour is involuntary rather than deliberate, i.e. not a narratorial or conversational strategy but the result of a genuine inability to assess what information is relevant and how much detail is required. In Gricean terms, Christopher's behaviour does not, I would argue, constitute a violation or flout of the relevant maxims (since both are intentional strategies), but rather an "infringement", which Thomas defines as follows:

> [a] speaker who, with no intention of generating an implicature and with no intention of deceiving, fails to observe a maxim is said to "infringe" the maxim. […] This type of non-observance could occur because the speaker has an imperfect command of the language (a young child or a foreign learner), because the speaker's performance is impaired in some way (nervousness, drunkenness, excitement), because of some cognitive impairment, or simply because the speaker is constitutionally incapable of speaking clearly, to the point, etc. (74)

In Christopher's case, the breaking of Grice's maxims provides evidence of his "cognitive impairment", namely his inability to assess what normally counts as the "appropriate" level of detail in communication. In the course of the narrative, it becomes clear that Christopher is actually unable to filter out irrelevant or distracting details from his environment (another characteristic that is known to be associated with autistic disorders): he does not like going on holiday because he finds new places overwhelming, and he indeed suffers some kind of stimulus overload when he ventures on a train trip on

his own. In other words, his problems with the maxims of quantity and relation are partly due to the fact that, as he puts it, he *notice(s) everything*, as well as to the fact that he has exceptional powers of memory. In addition, readers may attribute to Christopher the kind of cognitive limitation that is known as the "Theory of Mind" problem (Happé), i.e. an inability to construct the minds and mental states of other people. The fact that he gives either too much and too little information, can therefore be seen as a result of his inability to infer what his addressees already know and/or need to know, as well as of his memory power and attitude to detail.

I do not have the space to show how inferences about the workings and limitations of Christopher's mind can also be made from his relationship with telling the truth, which can be explained via Grice's maxim of Quality, and from his inability to follow the conventions captured by Politeness theory (Brown and Levinson; Leech). I do hope to have shown, however, that consistent patterns of communicative behaviour can be highly relevant to the study of mind style.

**Corpus linguistic methods and mind style**

The growth of corpus linguistics over the last few decades has provided new opportunities and tools for the linguistic study of literature, particularly with respect to the study of the systematic linguistic patterns that can contribute to the projection of mind style (see Hoover; Archer and McIntyre). Corpus-based techniques can be exploited both to test the analyst's intuitions and to identify patterns that might have otherwise been missed. In this section I will provide a few brief examples of how the software package *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott) can enhance a more traditional "manual" analysis of Haddon's *The Curious Incident*.

The "keywords" facility in *Wordsmith* allows the analyst to compare the list of words in a particular dataset with the list of words in a larger "reference" corpus, and to identify which words are used unusually frequently in the dataset as compared with the corpus. These unusually frequent words are regarded as "key". I used this facility to compare the text of *The Curious Incident* (approximately 62,000 words) with the fiction section of the Lancaster Speech, Writing and Thought presentation corpus (see Semino and Short 2004), which contains approximately 80,000 words of $20^{th}$ century fiction drawn from 40 different novels. The top five keywords as identified by Wordsmith are[3]: *and*, *I*, *because*, *said*, *then*.

The high frequency of *I* can of course be related to the fact that *The Curious Incident* is a first-person narrative. However, *I* was revealed to be the third top keyword even when I compared the novel with the first-person section of the fiction corpus (it occurs over 3,000 times in the 62,000-word text of the novel). It could be argued that the high frequency of *I* compared with other fictional texts reflects Christopher's focus on himself and relative alienation from others, which can be related to his autistic disorder. The presence of *and* and *then* in the top five keywords confirmed a pattern I had already noticed, namely that Christopher tends to use relatively simple sentence structures, where clausal coordination (especially via *and*) tends to be preferred to subordination. The high

frequency of *because* contrasts with this general pattern, but can be explained as a reflection of Christopher's preoccupation with reasons and causes, and his attempts to find some kind of causal logic on his experience of the world and other people. The high frequency of *said* also confirmed my earlier observation that Christopher tends to use a reporting clause with every utterance he represents, and that his reporting clauses tend to contain the verb *say*: in the extract from the novel quoted above, all six utterances are reported in direct speech and are preceded or followed by a reporting clause. Four out of the six reporting clauses include the verb *said*. The systematic use of reporting clauses, as well as the tendency to use *say*, lend a rather mechanical, stilted tone to Christopher's reporting of conversations, which is consistent with the idea that people with autistic disorders have difficulties with communication and with the social relationships that are expressed through them. In particular, the finding that *said* is overused in comparison with the reference corpus prompted a search for other common reporting verbs in *The Curious Incident*, which may carry more information about utterances than is provided by *say*.

I used the "Concord" facility in *Wordsmith* to search for occurrences of a selection of speech acts verbs that are used in the reference corpus to introduce direct speech (see Semino and Short 239-40). This revealed that Christopher's narrative in *The Curious Incident* contains no instances of common speech act verbs such as *admit*, *beg*, *demand*, *promise*, *warn*, and others. Rather, Christopher relies on a small set of relatively basic verbs indicating the occurrence of speech (*say* and *tell*) or, less frequently, simple speech acts and utterance types (e.g. *ask*, *answer*, *call* and *explain*). Cumulatively, Christopher's underlexicalisation in this area may reinforce the overall impression that he has difficulties understanding the illocutionary force of others' utterances and, more generally, the intentions and attitudes that lie behind what people say.

A proper demonstration of the potential of corpus-based methods for the analysis of mind style would require much more space than I have here. However, I hope to have shown that the exploitation of corpora via widely accessible software packages can rapidly provide information that may usefully confirm, refine or, possibly, refute the findings of more traditional analyses. This is particularly important in the investigation of (relative) systematicity in linguistic patterns, which is crucial in the study of mind style.

**Conclusions: beyond "mind style"?**

In this paper, I have argued that the phenomena captured by the notion of "mind style" are an important element of narrative fiction and should therefore (continue to) be a central concern in stylistics and narratology. The term itself is not without problems, however (see also Short).

In *Linguistics and the Novel*, Fowler states that the term "mind style" is intended to capture "an impression of a world view" (76) and "any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self" (103). In *Linguistic Criticism*, Fowler presents mind style as a less cumbersome alternative to Uspensky's notion of "point of view on the ideological plane" (150). In my own work, I have suggested that "mind

style" and "ideological point of view" could be used to capture different *aspects* of world views (see Semino and Swindelhurst; Semino "Cognitive Stylistic Approach to Mind Style"), i.e. respectively, the more personal, idiosyncratic aspects on the one hand and the more socially shared aspects on the other. While I still think that this distinction can usefully be made, I have come to realize that it can often be difficult to operationalize in practice, and can also be easily misinterpreted as an attempt to impose artificial boundaries between what is "cognitive" and what is "ideological" in world views, which was not my intention (see Weber 521-2). More generally, the term "mind style" is ambiguous as to whether it refers to linguistic patterns in texts ("style") or to the characteristics that we attribute to particular (fictional) minds by interpreting linguistic patterns in texts. There are also problems at the "normal" end of mind style, where, as Short noted, the concept seems to lose its usefulness, and to become equivalent to the more general notion of "style".

Therefore, while the term mind style may well be the most appropriate in particular cases, it is useful to reflect on the extent to which other existing terms can successfully capture the variety of phenomena that need to be taken into account in the study of fictional minds. In my view, the two most central *and interrelated* aspects which need to be considered are: a character's internal representation of the world they live in (including the minds of other characters), and the workings of a character's mind. These aspects correspond to the well-established (but not uncontroversial) notions of representations and processes in psychology and cognitive science (e.g. Mandler 10ff.).

The former aspect of fictional minds can probably be adequately captured by the (old) term "world view", which Fowler and Leech and Short originally replaced with "mind style". "World view" has the advantage that it is relatively transparent, and that it is explicitly connected with the related notion of fictional text "world". In other words, "world view" can successfully capture a particular representation of a (fictional) world in the mind of an individual (or of the members of a group). It can be seen as the combination of an individual's relatively permanent mental representations of the "reality" they inhabit, which include knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, and so on. These mental representations may vary in the extent to which they are personal and idiosyncratic, or shared with other individuals or groups. Here van Dijk's distinction between "personal" and "social" aspects of memory and belief is particularly relevant (indeed my definition of world view is influenced by Van Dijk's approach to ideology; see also Fanlo Piniés).

The latter aspect of characters' minds (i.e. the dynamic activities we attribute to them while reading a narrative), is aptly captured by Palmer's (new) term "fictional mental functioning". This term captures a fictional individual's mental processes, including thoughts, memories, intentions, desires, evaluations, feelings, emotions, and so on (see also Margolin). An individual's mental functioning may also (be perceived to) be more or less "standard" or "normal", i.e. it may include idiosyncratic or "nonstandard" characteristics and habits.

I should clarify once again that the phenomena captured by these terms are of course inextricably linked, and are both part of our perceptions of fictional minds. I should also spell out that the concepts of "mind", "mental functioning" and "world view" all refer to constructs that readers produce in the process of interpretation: we attribute minds and world views to characters, and we construct and monitor the functioning of these minds as we read a story or novel. All this happens as a result of the processing of linguistic choices and patterns in texts. These choices and patterns, as I have suggested, include any aspects of texts that can lead to inferences about the characteristics and functioning of a character's mind.

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## Notes

[1] As Cohn and others point out, third-person omniscient narrators have a special and unique status, which allows them to provide direct and complete access to characters' minds (assuming, of course, that the narrator is reliable). First-person narrators, in contrast, are normally subject to the same constraints of memory and self-awareness as ordinary human beings, and hence can only provide a limited view of their own past mental states and events (even though they experienced them directly). As I will show, however, the analysis of mind style in first-person narratives does not require reliable accounts of mental experiences, but is based on the inferences that can be made from a narrator's use of language on their cognitive habits and limitations (as in Benjy's case above).

[2] In fact, the novel exploits general knowledge and assumptions about people with high-functioning autism, rather than more specific and specialised knowledge about Asperger's syndrome in particular.

[3] These results were arrived at by adopting the default settings in *Wordsmith*. The Keywords facility operates with a maximum number of keywords of 500 and a minimum frequency for keywords of three occurrences. The degree of "keyness" is calculated on the basis of log likelihood, with a maximum value for p of 0.000001.