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Linguistics in the Study and Teaching of Literature

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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).

1 *Appropriate Use of Linguistic Theory in the Literature Classroom*

2
3 In this section, I discuss the terminology that we use for describing the
4 language of a literary text. It is best illustrated with an example. In
5 seventeenth-century poetry, certain types of imagery are called 'conceits';
6 these are metaphors that are often conventional (i.e. similar metaphors
7 can be found in earlier and classical literature; Ruthven 1969) and
8 deployed over an extended part of a text, often as part of a structured
9 argument. The term 'conceit' is a word of English, known to practitioners
10 and useful in understanding how those practitioners imagined their own
11 literary practice. We might call it a 'Rhetorical Term', because it is part
12 of a known and formalized poetics (a rhetoric). If we take a relevance-
13 theoretic approach to conceits, we might instead understand them as a
14 particular exploitation of the principle of relevance; we might say that
15 'conceit' is not a well-formed notion at this level, and not useful in
16 understanding how metaphors are processed in the mind, and we might
17 introduce the term 'implicature' in discussing this, and give it the technical
18 meaning specific to relevance theory (where an implicature is an intended
19 implication or contextual assumption). The term 'implicature' would be
20 a 'theoretical term': it exists only as a component of the theory itself.
21 Literary scholars tend to take what might be called an ethnographic
22 approach and work with rhetorical terms, while linguists tend to take a
23 universalizing or mentalistic approach and work with theoretical terms. In
24 the teaching of literature from a linguistic perspective, a middle way is
25 useful, as I now explain.

26 When I teach about metaphor (in my class on semantics for literature
27 students), I teach Grice's four maxims, and the co-operative principle, and
28 I expect the students to be able to identify which of the maxims is being
29 flouted; in a conceit, the maxim of quality is almost certainly flouted (as
30 more generally in metaphors). I teach this, despite having no theoretical
31 commitment to the notion of maxims; in fact, I take the relevance-
32 theoretic position that the maxims can be dispensed with entirely. So for
33 me, the term 'maxim of quality' is a 'useful term': it is neither part of a
34 general rhetoric nor of any theory that I have a commitment to, but I
35 find it useful. Why, then, teach something that I (strictly) do not
36 believe? I do so because I think students need a fairly rich terminology
37 for description, and as a way of understanding how texts work; a good
38 theory reduces its terminology as much as possible (by Occam's razor), but
39 this is not necessarily good for the classroom. The maxims are relatively
40 easy to understand; although the difference between the four maxims is
41 problematic, this is also a stimulus to discussion. In contrast, I find that
42 the theoretically most convincing account provided by relevance theory
43 gives too little for the student to grasp hold of and work with, and it is
44 too difficult without extensive study, compared with the easier notions of
45 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.

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 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
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31 32 33 *Note*

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