

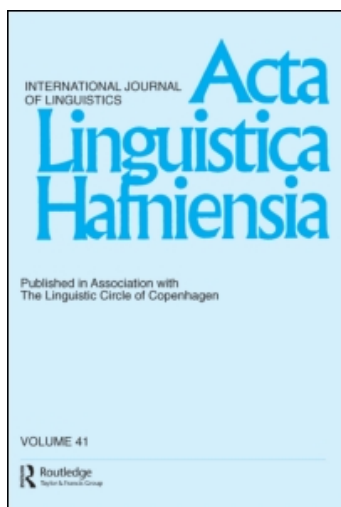
This article was downloaded by: [The Royal Library]

On: 24 October 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 912937946]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Acta Linguistica Hafniensia

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t914689389>

### How nice to be good at it: on the aesthetics of everyday language and the optimization of it in literature

Frans Gregersen<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The LANCHART Center, University of Copenhagen,

Online publication date: 01 October 2010

**To cite this Article** Gregersen, Frans(2010) 'How nice to be good at it: on the aesthetics of everyday language and the optimization of it in literature', Acta Linguistica Hafniensia, 42: 1, 159 – 176

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/03740463.2010.482327

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03740463.2010.482327>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## How nice to be good at it: on the aesthetics of everyday language and the optimization of it in literature

Frans Gregersen\*

*The LANCHART Center, University of Copenhagen*

*(Received June 2008; final version received May 2010)*

Taking its point of departure in Roman Jakobson's famous closing statement on Linguistics and Poetics, the paper demonstrates that many of the issues that we confront in linguistically based literary analysis have to be confronted in the analysis of everyday spoken language as well: questions of genre and enunciation are common for both modes of language, whereas the simple scale of written literature makes certain differences obvious and certain types of intricate construction possible which are not often found to the same extent in spoken language. The examples are drawn from present day spoken Danish as well as from Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* and Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering*.

**Keywords:** aesthetics of everyday language; genre; composition; enunciation; formal analysis; Ian McEwan, Sir Walter Scott

### 1. Introduction

In the Closing statement, the canonical text we are celebrating in this volume, Roman Jakobson makes two observations which I think are both worth discussing in detail. The first one is the central statement about the poetic function.

The set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language. . . . Any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. . . . when dealing with poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry. (Jakobson 1960: 356)

I have always found it hard to understand that the poetic function as such would be defined by reference to the message as such. But I wholeheartedly agree that the poetic function is more or less dormant but ever present in all kinds of language. The next passage is rather ironic as Michael Toolan with reference to Derek Attridge put it at the conference. It certainly has not been usual for linguists to study literature (Wallace Chafe is the obvious counterexample, but Ruqaiya Hasan might also be mentioned, apart from the authors of this volume, of course) but on the other hand, nor has it been normal for literary studies to look to linguistics for its

---

\*Email: fg@hum.ku.dk

insights. Rather the two disciplines of linguistics and poetics have lived in a sort of peaceful divorce, letting the other part flirt with others and even go to bed with linguistic strangers like deconstruction and hermeneutics. By taking this side of the never consummated marriage as my point of view, I immediately disclosed myself as a linguist and in the rest of this paper this will be evident.

I do however wish to stay a bit longer in the canonical surroundings just to focus on the next paragraph in the paper. Here, a further notion is introduced, that of efficacy. In the famous discussion of the slogan 'I like Ike', one of the first triumphs of modern sloganizing, or if you like: spinning, Jakobson notes that not only does it use rhymes and only one and the same diphthong, but the important thing is that the effect is awesome:

The secondary, poetic function of this electoral catch phrase reinforces its impressiveness and efficacy. (ibid: 357)

Now here we see that Jakobson gives a possible explanation for the poetic function, viz. one he hinted at somewhat earlier in the paper by referring to 'the well-ordered shape of the message'. It turns out that 'the focus on message for its own sake' is a focus on form. 'Message for its own sake' is not a focus on the referential content, but precisely the way this content is expressed or perhaps, more revealingly, the intricate relationship between the referential content and the way this is hammered into a specific form. There are certain ways of expressing content which seem more efficient, more well-ordered – in short more poetic or more aesthetic, to the producer as well as the recipient of the message. There is, however, no fixed formula for the poetic function since it is precisely concerned with the specific content being formed in a particular way.

'I like Ike', we must admit, is bleak and rather ordinary as a statement in a conversation. It could be the reply of the next person, and this in a way is precisely its point. It has to be shouted out in order to be both well-ordered and effective but the simple mind it aptly mimics, discloses a cunning devil behind, positioning the three star veteran general as just another likeable Ike.

I do think that the revelation which this essay brought to any reader disposed to think that linguists ought to analyze other aspects of sentences than their structure, was due to the analysis of a pedestrian subject such as 'I like Ike' just as much as the highbrow analysis of Mark Anthony's speech from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. It is a matter of irony that most of us when re-reading this passage see in our mind's eye the unforgettable Marlon Brando as Mark Anthony himself. This is the ultimate victory of film over theatre. And films, particularly Hollywood films, are matters profane and not canonical or even sacred as the essay we are concerned with here.

## 2. The vexing question of genre

The question of genre in everyday speech has been firmly on the agenda since the appearance of the English translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's essay on Speech genres. In this section I shall discuss what makes a speech genre and give some examples of genres which do not yet have literary equivalents.

The structural approach to genre is indispensable but it has to be based on a model of what a genre is and what functions the genres have. I take it to be a proven fact that genre in written and published modes of language functions as an instruction to the reader: Once he or she has grasped what is written on the cover or the first page, he or she actualizes his or her understanding of the genre and reads accordingly. It is a matter of course that the particular genre instruction may be disproved or even misused, so that the text itself is living proof that it does not belong. However, in most cases this works smoothly and effectively.

We have reason to believe that it is more or less the same which goes on in the production and comprehension of spoken language. Why then has it been so difficult to reach an agreement on which genres are represented in everyday conversations or even institutional talk? Two reasons may be offered: Firstly, the speech genres are more varied and more interwoven with each other than the literary genres, although the complexity of genre in literary fiction has often been underrated. Secondly, the speech genres are flexible historical products which arise when the need is there and are cast into oblivion once the need vanishes.

The first reason, the complexity of genres in speech, can best be conceptualized if we divide spoken modes into text types and genres. A text type would then be a descriptive term for a type of text which could be defined structurally and functionally but which did not have the historically entrenched characteristics of the real genre. In a way a text type is a sketch for what may become a genre, a candidate genre. In contrast, genres often have a normative character so that people would react to breaches by denying that the pertinent genre has been produced, or they will even reclassify the utterances: "That is not a joke that is an insult!" Or the irritated politician to the reporter: "If this is supposed to be an interview why not let *me* give all the answers!"

*I suggest that we may profitably count a text type as belonging to, or being an instance of, a specific genre once it fulfils the following conditions:*

- it has (as the result of an historical process) a rather fixed structure with both obligatory and optional structural elements;
- form and function may be closely related to each other; and
- the product is socially recognized as such, i.e. as being an instance of a specific genre, i.e. both in production and reception there is an historically based norm which the product adheres to.

### **2.1 An example – counselling**

In various institutional or not (yet?) institutionalized encounters we may isolate passages which have a distinct form-function relationship and may provisionally be characterized as follows:

## Characteristics of **COUNSELLING**

### *Participants:*

An expert and a lay person or more lay persons, thus the situation is ‘naturally’ asymmetric

### *Function:*

Problem solving

### *Setting:*

Often institutional, and the institution most often is the work place of the expert, thus the expert is the host, the lay person the guest, but the genre is also frequent in everyday conversation between e.g. intimate friends where the expertise in a specific area (cooking, child rearing, football etc.) of one or the other of the friends is a proven or conventionally given fact. The asymmetry may also arise directly from the role relationship of the interlocutors, e.g. between a father and son, or a mother and daughter

### *Structural elements:*

1. Statement of problem;
2. Open search for possible diagnosis of problem;
3. Proposals for further investigations or cure.

### *Linguistic consequences:*

1. is the province of the lay person;
2. includes one or several question-answer sequence(s);
3. includes one or more proposal-acceptance sequence(s); it is quite common to have veritable negotiations between the involved parties in this phase.

Where do we find this genre? Obviously it is present in doctor–patient discourse as well as in the institutional settings so characteristic of modern educational institutions where counselling and coaching have spread like mushrooms on a humid autumn day. The classic work is Frederick Erickson’s and Jeffrey Schulz’s book on the counsellor as gatekeeper but this work which appeared in 1982 antedates the diffusion of the genre into all walks of life. Furthermore, it is for my purposes important to point to the everyday use of the genre in conversations between mothers (or fathers, I did not mean to be sexist) about which kind of diaper is the right one for the world’s and the child’s future, as well as the business associates’ small talk of stock exchange opportunities. Wherever there is asymmetry – or as we shall see, wherever we may profitably introduce an asymmetry – we find counselling sequences.

Consider the business associates who are closing a deal and thus in this sense equal partners. If one of them tries to elicit advice from the other on matters equally known to both of them, this is a subtle positioning of himself as less knowledgeable, and hence in a sense inferior, than the interlocutor and thus a fine example of paying tributes.

Obviously, the genre is not confined to speech but has spread into all kinds of counselling books and expert services in the magazines for construction, boats, sports, social matters and not least family life. It has not, however, to my knowledge resulted in a literary genre yet. This is because the relationship between literary genres and speech genres is asymmetrical: Not all speech genres have developed a fictional literary counterpart or even a literary (i.e. written) one, but literary genres all have their (original) counterparts in everyday conversation. This is not to say that they are equivalent. Most often the literary genres have of course evolved considerably when compared to everyday conversation.

## 2.2 *The narrative as a case in point*

For many years the study of speech genres had one case to boast of, the personal narrative. Conventionally, we sociolinguists refer to the classic paper by Labov and Waletzky as the starting point for a number of studies focussing on the structural elements of the narrative, the telling of narratives and the content of narratives (a convenient reference for the study of Danish narratives is the Ph.D. dissertation by the late Erik Møller (Møller 1993) and the state of the international art may be had from Schiffrin 2006 and Benwell and Stokoe 2006.

If we attempt to give the same type of outline of this speech genre it would look more or less like this:

### Characteristics of **THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE**

#### *Participants:*

Narrator(s) and audience

#### *Function:*

Diverse: entertainment, argument, illustration, and on another level: making personal experience public

#### *Setting:*

The favoured setting is any situation belonging to the intimate sphere but from there, the personal narrative is exported to all kinds of settings as 'a personal touch', an anecdote or an exemplum

#### *Structural elements:*

(Orientation), complicating action, evaluation, resolution, (coda)

#### *Linguistic consequences:*

Narrator(s) has/have the turn; audience should listen and tune in; but the narrator(s) has/have to deliver: The point of the narrative has to be worth the listening; otherwise the murderous 'SO WHAT!' will be uttered

Now it is my contention that we may find all kinds of features of the personal narrative which have been cultivated by the writers of fiction into shades of viewpoints and ambivalence as to the modal status of the proposition. To prove this I will analyze one of the narratives from the Copenhagen Urban

Sociolinguistic Study (Gregersen and Pedersen 1991). This analysis is followed by a study of the narrative ambivalence in Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*.

#### THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE: THE ASSAULT

men altså så var jeg jo også led ik'  
*but anyway I was a stinker too right*

fordi P jeg kan huske da vi boede over i Svanegade  
*because P I can remember when we lived over on Svanegade*

da lå jeg nede på taget af skuret  
*and I was lying down on the roof of the shed*

og så kommer Thorkild gående  
*and then Thorkild comes walking along*

og gudskelov havde han den der berømte flyverdragt på  
*and thank God he had on that famous snowsuit*

med den der P ret kraftige hætte over ik'  
*with that P pretty thick hood on right*

interviewer: (ja P)  
interviewer: (yes P)

og så siger han til mig at han skulle ind iT  
*and then he says to me that he was going insideT*

skuret og hente sin cykel P  
*the shed to get his bicycle P*

så sagde jeg du får ikke lov til at komme ind og  
*so I said you aren't allowed to come in and*

hente din cykel fordi her bor jeg  
*get your bicycle because this is where I live*

og jeg kan godt love dig hvis du går igennem den dør  
*and I promise you if you walk through that door*

så hakker jeg riven lige ned i hovedet på dig  
*I-am going to hack the rake right down in your head*

interviewer: ((latter) P)  
interviewer: ((laughter) P)

og så gjorde han det P  
*and so he did it P*

og jeg lå deroppe på taget med riven  
*and I was lying up there on the roof with the rake*

og han fik den også lige ned i hovedet  
*and he did get it right down in the head*

og min moder hun var jo helt ude af den ik'  
*and my mother she was completely out of her mind right*

og P ind på skadestuen  
*and P in to the emergency clinic*

og ringe efter min fader  
*and phone for my father*

og P T da min fader kommer hjem  
*and P T when my father comes home*

da havde jeg taget gas  
*I had taken gas*

fordi nu ville jeg altså begå selvmord  
*because now I wanted to commit suicide*

interviewer: (ja)  
*interviewer: (yes)*

for det kunne jeg ikke klare det der vel'  
*because that was more than I could take*

men jeg havde T havde slået hul på mine nye strømpebukser  
*but I had T had torn a hole in my new tights*

jeg kan huske jeg var så stolt af dem ik' og  
*I can remember I was very proud of them right and*

interviewer: (ja)  
*interviewer: (yes)*

og jeg tænkte ih de har nok kostet mange penge  
*and I thought my they must have cost a lot of money*

og P det var jeg faktisk sådan mest ked af  
*and P that was what I was actually most upset about*

det var de der strømpebukser ik'  
*it was those tights right*

og så da jeg egentlig fandt ud af at P der egentlig  
*and then when I did find out that P nothing much*

ikke var sket ret meget med Thorkild vel'  
*had really happened to Thorkild*

interviewer: (nej)  
*interviewer: (no)*

men altså okay han havde da takkerne af riven ik'  
*but then okay he had got the tines of the rake right*

så sagde jeg bare til ham Gud hvor jeg glæder mig  
*so I just said to him God how I'm looking forward*

til at du bliver voksen og du bliver skaldet  
*to when you grow up and you get bald*

så kan jeg se alle dine ar ik'  
*so I can see all your scars right*



den har han altså hørt for mange gange ik'  
*he's heard that one too many times right*<sup>1</sup>

men han kunne jo også lade være  
*but then he didn't have to do it*

for jeg havde advaret ham ik'  
*because I had warned him right*

interviewer: (jo)  
*interviewer: (yes)*

men jeg v- men jeg var altså en hidsigprop ik'  
*but I wa- but I was a real crosspatch right*

Møller 1991: 269-72, cf Møller 1993

Transcription conventions (Gregersen and Pedersen 1991:3): P: pause; T: hesitation

The genre personal narrative has to a certain extent already been analyzed as being the origin for the short story. A possible pedigree puts the personal narrative as the source genre for narratives which do not necessarily have the main protagonist as the narrator thus paving the way for all kinds of narrative fiction. The short story is the most obvious case in point since most discussions of this genre demand the same kind of unity of matter and purpose leading to an effective point as we find in the personal narrative.

However this may be, I am not concerned here with the structural elements but with the ambivalence as to the point of this story which gives it its peculiar flavour and in a way may be seen as an aesthetic quality to it.

On the face of it, this is a moral story about a children's conflict, dramatic in both its event structure and its conclusion. The little(?) sister threatens the (older?) brother with the consequences if he dares to enter the shed. The brother accepts the challenge and duly gets punished although the punishment is of a character which might have cost him (and consequently her) dearly. He might have been injured for life. The moral is obvious: The author is guilty and feels her guilt so intensely that she wants to commit suicide by 'taking gas', i.e. opening the valves for the city gas then commonly used for the stoves, to flow freely into a tightly closed room. This was a normal way to commit suicide before the use of cars.

Note though what happens here, precisely at the climax: The author corrects herself so that there is apparently no moral guilt whatsoever involved. Rather in the fight or what ensued she had ruined her new tights and this was the real reason why she wanted not to live anymore!

<sup>1</sup> I am not absolutely certain that this is indeed the correct translation. In Danish 'høre for' is a collocation which means to be blamed for. A possible translation would thus be: *He's been blamed for this many times*. The two interpretations are not equivalent and it may be of some importance that the alternative translation/interpretation does not presuppose that this story has been told many times (to Thorkild).

However, there is in fact a more or less moral side to this explanation for taking gas: They must have been expensive, she thinks. Accordingly, we may still understand her reaction as one of guilt but this time not for killing her brother but for ruining an expensive piece of clothing (which she was very proud of, it is not only that they cost a lot of money). At this point there is a kind of climax. The story could easily have ended here. If so, however, it would have lacked the punch line which together with the action depicted corroborates the initial (and final) statement. The punch line is prefaced by an inquit but is a direct rendering of a punch line which in itself is more imaginative than probable in the situation. It is a typical example of sacrificing a role appropriate behaviour for a much more effective line which makes much more sense now in the telling present since the interviewer already knows her brother (he was also an informant) and perhaps would like to check his bald head when he speaks to him.

The story coda is of a different kind, falling into the category of general wisdom: I was mean but he made me, by accepting the challenge instead of backing out. It is as if this the 5<sup>th</sup> narrative in the long string of narratives (Møller notes that he had not said very much as the interviewer before the first narrative appeared; in total Alice M (not her real name of course) told 34 narratives in the course of the two hours of interviewing), has to be both prefaced and framed at the end by a more general remark so that we may proceed to the next one in the string.

Alice M is a skilled narrator. Not only does she distribute the orientation sequences so that they invariably occur just when we need them to understand the flow of events, she uses nearly all the means available for narrators to dramatize: tense shifting from past to present and back again for orientation, direct quotation lines, etc. She also slows down the tempo creating additional suspense by inserting an orientation sequence ('and I was lying up there on the roof', just in case we forgot how dangerous it was for him) immediately before Thorkild gets the rake in his head and finishes the story with the punch line in direct speech.

Precisely because she is such an accomplished narrator, it is interesting to note that the story is ambiguous, to say the least, about what it is actually about: Is this really about children quarrelling and what may happen to 'crosspatches'? Or is it about the pride of a small girl in her expensive tights? Or perhaps both?

### 2.3 *On the beach or at seaside?*

Preliminaries:

Ian McEwan's 2007 book is a short novel focussing on the (catastrophic) consummation of sexual intercourse on the wedding night and first day of honeymoon of Edward and Florence. The novel is firmly situated in a specific period, i.e. the beginning of the sixties. Here is the opening sentence:

They were young, educated, and both virgins on this, their wedding night, and they lived in a time when a conversation about sexual difficulties was plainly impossible.  
(p.3)

So the novel is ostensibly about a period, it is a period piece. This evidently calls for typical characters, here the strong, gifted young man from the petit bourgeoisie who meets and falls in love with the Upper Middle Class Florence, oldest daughter of a successful businessman and a philosopher don(na) who is described as a political and spiritual but absolutely non-sensual being.

The wedding night is the focus and the central scene from which flash backs cast light on the previous history of the two central characters. The reason the book is a tragedy is that the sexual act arouses the active disgust of the female protagonist.

Florence's anxieties were more serious, and there were moments during the journey from Oxford when she thought she was about to draw on all her courage to speak her mind. But what troubled her was unutterable and she could barely frame it for herself. Where he merely suffered conventional first-night nerves, she experienced a visceral dread, a helpless disgust as palpable as seasickness. (p.7)

We note that this connects to the first paragraph. Florence is unable to voice her disgust, not because it is disgust, although it must be admitted that this is in itself a problem, but because she 'could barely frame it for herself'. We are in the sixties, and sex is definitely not a subject. So the story has two threads: One is the unravelling of the disastrous effects of Florence's disgust and the other is the search for the reason for her disgust.

MY CLAIM is that the novel on the surface diagnoses Florence's disgust as typical of the period: this is a portrait of the period before the liberation of sex, but that beneath this diagnosis the texture and elaborate composition of the book hints at – but never actually states – that Florence was abused by her father when they were out sailing in her childhood. This is what composition is about: giving away hints to the alert reader. There is no doubt in my mind that this story may be read at both levels and that this is an effect, an aesthetic effect of its composition.

As EVIDENCE for my claim I present the following quotations taken from various passages throughout the book, note that they are precisely scattered and do not form one coherent story.

We remember that 'as palpable as seasickness' constituted the first mention of the central problem of Florence's disgust. There is another mention of occasions for seasickness some fifty pages later:

As often happened when she had been away, her father aroused in her conflicting emotions. There were times when she found him physically repellent and she could hardly bear the sight of him – his gleaming baldness, his tiny white hands ... She hated hearing his enthusiastic reports about the boat, the ridiculously named *Sugar Plum* ... He used to take her out with him, and several times when she was twelve and thirteen, they crossed all the way to Carteret near Cherbourg. They never talked about those trips. (p.50)

The ominous 'never talked about' constitutes a typical literary technique, and indeed if I may be a bit blunt here, a rather blunt one at that: Why mention that

they never talked about those trips if not because they constitute a hidden trauma. And indeed when the author talks about the trips, we learn:

At the wedding night close to the climax, Florence is listening in the hotel room to the sound of Edward undressing:

Here came the past anyway, the indistinct past. It was the smell of the sea that summoned it. She was twelve years old, lying still like this, waiting, shivering in the narrow bunk with polished mahogany sides. Her mind was a blank, she felt she was in disgrace. After a two-day crossing, they were once more in the calm of Carteret harbour, south of Cherbourg. It was late in the evening, and her father was moving about the dim cramped cabin, undressing like Edward now. . . . Her only task was to keep her eyes closed and to think of a tune she liked. Or any tune. She remembered the sweet scent of almost rotten food in the closed air of a boat after a rough trip. She was usually sick many times on the crossing, and of no use to her father as a sailor, and that surely was the source of her shame. (p.99f)

This is a brilliant passage and arguably the centrepiece of the period piece since it opens a new interpretation of Florence's disgust. The flash back is caused by two sensations, the sounds of a man undressing, now: Edward, then: her father, and the presence of the sea. As we have already discovered, there is a connection between 'the sea' and 'seasickness' and now also shame. From the point of view of enunciation, the final sentence is both the cue and clue: She was seasick and thus of no use as a sailor 'and that surely was the source of her shame.' What earthly individual is pronouncing or thinking this 'surely' which - precisely as the mention of a subject 'they never talked about' - only serves to alert the reader to the opposite possibility. If her inability as a sailor was in fact not the source of her shame, which by the way is posed as a fact, there is no doubt about the shame, only about its cause, then what? The other possibility is that the undressing of the father has to do with her dutiful blank mind. Again: This is a period piece of the last days of Victorianism: Florence at twelve naturally would have to keep her eyes closed when her father undresses, but why the strange task 'to think of a tune she liked. Or any tune.' Again: It is quite possible that a young girl forces herself to think of something else when her father undresses in order not to think of him as an incarnation of sex. The strange sentence is 'Or any tune' since that cannot be the task assigned by the girl herself. If the girl had assigned herself the task, she would have known which it was and thus have phrased it without the characteristic dual possibilities structure. It would have been one or the other since it would have been her very own, by now well tried, means of distracting her mind from sex.

If this argument has any validity, it can only be the father who is the author of the line: 'Or any tune'. And if this is the case, the abuse is more than alluded to here, it is subtly disclosed, and surely this was the real reason why Florence felt shame, and why they never talked about the trips since.

The climax of the book is the painfully complete description of the unbearably embarrassing scene of their first and only attempt at sexual intercourse. Edward has just 'emptied himself over her':

And there was another element, far worse in its way and quite beyond her control, summoning memories she had long ago decided were not really hers. She had taken pride, only half a minute before, in mastering her feelings and appearing calm. But now she was incapable of repressing her primal disgust, her visceral horror at being doused in fluid, in slime from another body. . . . Nothing in her nature could have held back her instant cry of revulsion. The feel of it crawling across her skin in thick rivulets, its alien milkiness, its intimate starchy odour, which dragged with it the stench of a shameful secret locked in musty confinement – she could not help herself, she had to be rid of it. (p.105f)

In this passage we no longer can uphold any doubt as to what causes Florence's disgust. The semen brings back memories 'she had long ago decided were not really hers'. These memories stem from a 'shameful secret locked in musty confinement' i.e. the cabin in the boat. I take it that this novel has now disclosed to us that Florence's disgust is the result of her being abused as a twelve year old child by her father in the boat on the trips they never talked about. She has repressed these memories as 'not really hers' and what happens in the climax scene is that Edward becomes in a sense a reincarnation of her father performing his abuse of her.

She has to 'be rid of it' - and goes on to become a successful violin player forming a string quartet according to her wishes (she plays first violin) down to the important detail of the name: The Ennismore Quartet. The novel tells the later story of Edward but not of Florence except through the bits of news that do *not* reach Edward – but luckily by the same token do reach the reader.

Even if he had read the papers in those times, he would have been unlikely to turn to the arts pages, to the long thoughtful reviews of concerts. His precarious interest in classical music had faded entirely in favour of rock and roll. So he never heard about the Ennismore Quartet's triumphant debut at the Wigmore Hall in July 1968. (p.162)

The whole coda of the story, consisting of the final somewhat distraught six or seven pages, indeed seems to be there to reinforce the idea of the novel as a period piece: 'Towards the end of that celebrated decade, when his life came under pressure from all the new excitements and freedoms and fashions, as well as from the chaos of numerous love affairs . . .' (p.160).

A period piece has to find something typical in its characters or in the plot, viz. typical of the period it is portraying. Can we take it that Ian McEwan in *On Chesil Beach* argues that the typical female before the arrival of 'the famous decade' had been abused by her father and had repressed her guilt and shame so that sexuality became a mission impossible? Surely not. We must revise our genre expectations stemming from the first paragraph and instead look at the book as the dissection of a specific relationship which might be found today as well. And then again: The climate of the period prevented Florence from talking about her shameful past in terms that would make this past understandable both to herself and to Edward. So the book is precisely both a period piece and a dissection of a childhood tragedy which becomes fatal to the relationship and future fate of two (one?) young people.

The ambivalence is fruitful for the aesthetic decoding of the book's genre and structure since it opens for two possibilities being actualized both of them simultaneously.

### 3. The problem of enunciation

In the study of the personal narrative it was the original contention of William Labov that we would find in such passages the true vernacular of the person interviewed. The argument was based on the idea that it takes a certain amount of mental energy to monitor your own speech and that this energy is directed towards the reliving of the crucial episode while telling it. Note that the personal narratives Labov was dealing with in his New York Study were indeed narratives of crucial episodes since they were more or less elicited by the famous *danger of death* question. The informant is positioned as a narrator by having answered in the affirmative and the interviewer leans back happily anticipating an engaging story based on uniquely reportable stuff: Life and death.

Whenever I teach this subject, I am invariably asked whether what we get in such interviews is not precisely well rehearsed and often told stories so that there is ample opportunity for monitoring since the story more or less tells itself. I am not able to answer this often posed question since whenever I have tried to ask Danes the *danger of death* question they have invariably just said 'no' and thus have left me in dire need of an instrument to break through to their vernacular - if there is such a thing.

Another point altogether is that the definition of the personal narrative is so broad and the genre so well known (telling stories) that a host of other narratives pop up in all interviews and thus we are not in need of the danger of death question if we want people to tell narratives in Denmark. The resulting stories some of them have a peculiarity that I have until now not seen treated as such: Many of the narratives include quotations, i.e. informants giving voice to another protagonist in the story and in some way, not yet thoroughly understood theoretically though easily detectable in practice, indicates that this is another person speaking. But if this is indeed the case, then whose vernacular are we given access to in the personal narrative? We are currently investigating whether the quotations are in fact different as to the use of sociolinguistic variants from the surrounding narrative passages and so far we have not been able to uncover any significant difference. This may, however, be due to the fact that we need several variants to carry out statistical tests and though frequent, quotations are not that frequent even in narratives (they do occur outside narratives too, of course).

The study of quotations has developed into a major industry in recent years since they flourish in youth language (Buchstaller). The standard issues linguistically have quickly become how this is accomplished syntactically and phonetically. Is there any indication by way of preparing the listener that what you are going to hear in the next seconds will be something for which I am not responsible as the author, I am just giving voice to another person's words? Some

researchers have pointed to the development in youth language of new inquit markers like English 'like' and Swedish 'ba'. No such marker can, however, be found in Danish (Rathje 2010).

Marianne Rathje in a recent paper, published before she finished her dissertation on youth language (Rathje 2007; 2010), brings the following example of the phenomenon from her study of young WC women:

*Maja has just been denied entrance to a pub by a doorman and tells about this in the following way:*

ja dig du kan heller ikke komme ind du er kun  
*yeah you you may not either be allowed in you are only*

sytten (p) æh ja right men det var lissom min veninde  
*seventeen (p) yeah right but this was like my friend*

du lige har lukket ind hun er kun seksten ikk altså  
*you have just let in she is only sixteen right so*  
 (Rathje 2007: 82)

The quotation starts right *in medias res*, there is no inquit, only the voice quality to signal what is going on here. Obviously, it is the doorman speaking and not Maja. He tells her that she cannot enter and gives her the reason why. Her reaction is dramatized as well, making the passage ambivalent: Is this what she actually said at the time or is it what she might have said at the encounter with this particular authority, looking back from the telling time at the time of the incident? I think that we will have to opt for the second possibility. So what she voices here is her inner speech at the encounter, as she would have liked it to be, looking back on it. If this was what she actually said at the time that would have put her friend inside in the awkward position as being an intruder. The friend would thus have been placed as the innocent victim of Maja's argument with the doorman. The consequences might very well have been that the doorman asked: 'OK, then, who is this we are talking about?' only later to fetch her and throw her out. Or - if denied an answer by Maja - he would at once deny her accusation as false. So this is inner speech but dramatized as an effective line, the line, so to speak, which might have been the best reply in the situation but could not be realized.

As with many youth stories, this is about moral authority, justice. The authorities should treat everybody fairly, and they notably failed here. But the aesthetically interesting point is that the dramatization of the situation makes for lively listening which is precisely the reason why it is put to use. The story is much more effective by showing by voice distortion how the doorman abused his authority and by going on with the quote from the narrator herself. Instead of giving us all the thoughts that ran through her head at this important junction of her life, Maja condenses her moral contempt into one line.

At least since Bakhtin and Genette the study of the levels of enunciation in literature has flourished and given us important insights into the possibilities of manipulating point of view in the interest of effectiveness. Effectiveness often

means to arouse the reader's interest or to keep his attention but most often has to do with perspective. In linguistic terms this is the province of mode: Who is responsible for the proposition uttered and to what degree? In the following, I shall try to demonstrate this point by looking at an unlikely example, viz. a passage from Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering*.

*Guy Mannering* is not a historical novel in the manner of the *Talisman* or *Ivanhoe* but it is a romantic novel skilfully using the clash between a particular form of superstition (i.e. believing in astrology as the determinant of individual fates) belonging to the rationalistic period (sic!) with the rationalism of the romantic period, all the while demonstrating that superstition is a magic trick for a narrator since he then has the expected fatal outcome to confront. What eventually happened? Did the protagonists escape their doom?

In the following passage, the villain, the lawyer Glossin, is paying his tribute to a local magnate, sir Robert Hazlewood, of whom we learn that:

In his general deportment he was pompous and important, affecting a specious of florid elocution, which often became ridiculous from his misarranging the triads and quaternions with which he loaded his sentences. (Scott 1815 (1974): p.296)

This description is the cue for what comes four or five pages later. Here we get what the description amounts to in lines:

The good Glossin has captured our hero by the name of Mr. Vanbeest Brown after an 'assault on young Hazlewood' (which was indeed of course an attempt to help out) and is now bringing him to be judged by the worthy baronet since he is the justice of peace. But Glossin has to prepare Sir Robert before presenting the prisoner. This is Sir Robert's last turn before the confrontation and only an excerpt:

"I will enquire into it, my good sir," said the learned Baronet. "Yet even now I venture to conjecture that I shall adopt the solution or explanation of this riddle, enigma or mystery which you have in some degree thus started. Yes! revenge it must be – and, good Heaven! entertained by and against whom? – entertained, fostered, cherished against young Hazlewood of Hazlewood, and in part carried into effect, executed, implemented, by the hand of Vanbeest Brown! (ibid.: p.301)

We are in no doubt of who is speaking here and indeed would never be in doubt as to how the author judges this character. He is depicted not only as a conceited old fool but also as someone easy to manipulate - and a character prone to stop the plot from developing. There is thus a danger for any author of overdoing such caricatures. They are funny but they stop the show from going on, whether they be read as showstoppers or not.

In literature the conventional means of indicating who is responsible for the words are quotation marks and inquit indicators of various sorts. The issue of voice distortion does not arise, it is not necessary. On the other hand, the simple telling of who is responsible for the words is not enough to keep us reading a text. The text has to show us by colouring the words given in quotation marks, what kind of person is uttering them. This demonstrative effect is clearly seen in the



above quotation which might have given Charles Dickens, the accomplished virtuoso of this sort of device, some of his inspiration.

In another sense, the various voices are there to intensify the drama. In drama texts the reader is appointed to cast him- or herself as all the players at once, imagining how he or she would have performed this or that line. In narrative fiction there is a narrator and this voice has to be distinctive as well. We have to like or dislike the narrator - we have to *want to* listen to his tale for better or for worse. Sir Walter Scott was a narrator who could deliver. His epic style in *Guy Mannering* is not as clear and direct as in some of the later novels but he experiments with a lot of devices for dramatizing his tale which would later be put to good use by mainstream authors all over Europe.

In this passage, our demonstrably evil villain Mr. Glossin has incarcerated his former accomplice captain Dirk Hatteraick in a house which should be easy to escape from, in the hope that his accomplice will not disclose their old ties:

Galled with the anxious forebodings of a guilty conscience, Glossin now arose, and looked out upon the night. The scene which we have already described in the third chapter of this story, was now covered with snow, and the brilliant, though waste, whiteness of the land, gave to the sea by contrast a dark and livid tinge. A landscape covered with snow, though abstractedly it may be called beautiful, has, both from the association of cold and barrenness, and from its comparative infrequency, a wild, strange, and desolate appearance. Objects, well known to us in their common state, have either disappeared, or are so strangely varied and disguised, that we seem gazing on an unknown world. But it was not with such reflections that the mind of this bad man was occupied. His eye was upon the gigantic and gloomy outlines of the old castle, where, in a flanking tower of enormous size and thickness, glimmered two lights, one from the window of the strong room, where Hatteraick was confined, the other from that of the adjacent apartment occupied by his keepers. "Has he made his escape, or will he be able to do so? - Have these men watched, who never watched before, in order to complete my ruin? - If morning finds him there, he must be committed to prison; Mac-Morlan or some other person will take the matter up - he will be detected - convicted - and will tell all in revenge! -"

While these racking thoughts glided rapidly through Glossin's mind, he observed one of the lights obscured, as by an opaque body placed at the window. What a moment of interest! - "He has got clear of his irons! - he is working at the stanchions of the window - they are surely quite decayed, they must give way - O God! they have fallen outward; I heard them clink among the stones! - the noise cannot fail to wake them - furies seize his Dutch awkwardness! - The light burns free again - they have torn him from the window, and are binding him in the room! - No! he had only retired an instant on the alarm of the falling bars - he is at the window again - and the light is quite obscured now - he is getting out! -". (ibid.: p.226f)

In this long passage we see how the author uses the different means at his disposal to dramatize a very dramatic event, the event of captain Hatteraick's escape so that Glossin is not denounced as the instigator of the original crime that frames the whole story: the abduction of the young heir to the Ellangowan estate. The first part is seen from the author's bird's eye. He knows what goes on inside Glossin ('Galled with the . . .') and tells us so. But instantly he turns with Glossin to a description of the setting. Why? Because he has to establish in the reader a

mental picture of the white night and the dramatic surroundings. We have been told of the surroundings before and he duly instructs us to look at chapter three or to remember that we are close to the old Ellangowan castle, built by the first fierce Norman barons and now abandoned in favour of the new mansion where Glossin resides. But there is a crucial difference: the snow has covered the ground completely. The author allows himself to reason about what snow does to a scenery: it makes the scenery abstract. He is conversing with us on the various effects only to end in 'an unknown world'. These thoughts are the animadversions of a learned and likeable man conducting a fireside conversation with the reader. It slows down the tempo only slightly and it paves the way for the abrupt shift to the thoughts of the wicked Glossin: 'But it was not with such reflections . . .'

The next passage demonstrates through the eyes of Glossin not the abstract but the very concrete buildings and directs our attention to the two windows which function as the screen for the ensuing film. Whenever a light is changed, something is going on inside the jail.

At the end of this passage, Scott uses quotation marks to give us Glossin's (inner?) conversation with himself on a subject which the reader needs to be reminded of: What will happen if Captain Hatteraick is actually kept in the prison until the day after. Utter ruin will befall him. The creation of suspense via the content is essential for the reading, but the passage is replete with DASHES marking a higher tempo. This is in accordance with the rapid nature of gliding thoughts ('While these racking thoughts glided rapidly . . .') but in the next passage the same technique is used for quite a different purpose. Here Scott uses Glossin as a reporter on the spot excitedly giving us the results of his looking intensely at the two windows. The curious 'What a moment of interest' is the shifter from a third person narrative to a first person reporting style (cf. Stjernfelt and Zeuthen in this volume). The main protagonist pushes the author aside and so to speak takes charge over the telling of the story himself – and we read with intensified attention.

#### 4. Conclusion and a short statement of the real problem

I have attempted to show that the study of speech and the study of fictional literature may benefit from each other in the study of

- genres,
- composition,
- enunciation,

and that in all these respects, fictional literature builds on and expands aesthetic effects which are well known and often rehearsed in normal speech events.

It stands to reason that there are indeed, as Jakobson so eloquently pointed out 50 years ago, aesthetic effects in everyday spoken language, they are all over. But why? Ay there is the rub. So the real problem is:

What survival benefits accrued from being good at e.g. telling stories, and how did the aesthetic qualities adapt to the functions and forms which developed

before writing. A – necessarily speculative – answer to this question would form the starting point for a deeper history of aesthetic forms, viz. the natural evolutionary story of aesthetics in speech.

### Notes on contributor

Frans Gregersen is professor of Danish Language at the Department of Scandinavian Studies and Linguistics, University of Copenhagen, and director of the Danish national Research Foundation LANCHART Centre (cf. www.lanchart.dk). He is a linguist by training and a sociolinguist by persuasion.

### References

#### primary sources analyzed in the paper:

- The assault. personal narrative by Alice M., from Møller 1991: pp. 269–272.  
 McEwan, Ian. 2007. *On Chesil Beach*. London: Jonathan Cape.  
 Scott, Walter, S. 1974. *Guy Mannering*. Everyman edition, London: J.M. Dent and Sons.  
 A young girl's story of being unfairly treated by a doorman, from Rathje 2007:82.

#### secondary sources:

- Benwell, Bethan and Elizabeth Stokoe. 2006. *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.  
 Buchstaller, Isabel. 2006. "Diagnostics of Age Graded Linguistic Behavior: The Case of the Quotative System". in: *Journal of Sociolinguistics* vol. 30, 1: 3–30.  
 Erickson, Frederick and Jeffrey Shultz. 1982. *The Counsellor as gate-keeper: Social Interaction in Interviews*. New York: Academic Press.  
 Gregersen, Frans and Inge Lise Pedersen (eds.). 1991. *The Copenhagen Study in Urban Sociolinguistics Part 1-2*, (Institut for dansk Dialektforskning publikationer, Serie A, nr.30, Universitets-Jubilæets Danske Samfunds skriftserie, Nr. 516), . Copenhagen: C.A.Reitzel.  
 Jakobson, Roman 1960. "Closing statement: Linguistics and Poetics", in Sebeok, Thomas A. (ed.): *Style in Language*, Cambridge, Mass. The MIT Press, 350–377.  
 Labov, William and Joshua Waletzky. 1967. "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experiences". in Helm (ed.): *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 12–45.  
 Møller, Erik. 1991. "Narratives in the sociolinguistic interview", in: Gregersen and Pedersen 1991: 241–335.  
 Møller, Erik. 1993. *Mundtlig fortælling – fortællingens struktur og funktion i uformel tale*, (Institut for Dansk Dialektforskning publikationer, serie A, nr. 31). Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel.  
 Perregaard, Bettina. 2001. "Tre spor i sprogvidenskabens udforskning af den mundtlige fortælling". in: *Danske Studier 2001* : 29–64.  
 Rathje, Marianne. 2007. "Så stod jeg bare der:" citathyping og citatmarkering i tre generationer?!", in: Sandersen, Vibeke and Jørgen Schack (eds.): *Dansk Sprognævn – godt og vel 50 år efter*. (Dansk Sprognævns skrifter, 40), Copenhagen: Dansk Sprognævn.  
 Rathje, Marianne. 2010. *Generationssprog*. (Dansk Sprognævns Skrifter 43), Copenhagen: Dansk Sprognævn.  
 Schiffrin, Deborah. 2006. *In other Words. Variation in Reference and Narrative*. (Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.