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MIND STYLE AND COGNITIVE GRAMMAR: LANGUAGE AND WORLDVIEW IN SPECULATIVE FICTION (2018) BY LOUISE NUTTALL

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Nuttall, Louise. *Mind Style and Cognitive Grammar: Language and Worldview in Speculative Fiction*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 213 pp.

In an impressive addition to the field of cognitive stylistics, Louise Nuttall detects and harnesses the explanatory potential that Cognitive Grammar (CG) offers for an analysis of mind style in Speculative Fiction. Her focus on mind style, the representation of a character's inner workings – their “values and beliefs” – through linguistic expression, offers novel insights both on the texts and on readers' experiences of them (17). Through a series of four case studies of Speculative Fiction texts, Nuttall makes a strong argument for what analyses of mind style in this genre may offer to cognitive stylistics. Mind style has often been explored in characters that are in some way deviant from a default, such as individuals with a cognitive impairment, or criminals who exhibit extreme, psychologically deviant personality traits (18-23). Identifying deviation as being abundant in characters in Speculative Fiction, Nuttall argues that within the “strange worlds” explored in this genre, rather than being the result of cognitive impairments or criminal aberration, deviations in mind styles are a result of “the characters' physical and social environment and their individual personality traits” (20).

Nuttall approaches her analysis of mind style from the perspective of CG, which offers a principled methodology for the study of the linguistic choices through which mind style is represented in the text. The present approach thereby escapes a frequently voiced criticism towards cognitive stylistics – that it is focused on reader interpretations rather than driven by textual analysis – by looking at the texts through the lens of an independent, systematic framework. As a subdiscipline of Cognitive Linguistics, CG facilitates “fine-grained analysis of the cognitive structures and processes suggested by particular linguistic choices” and focuses on the connection between language, cognition, and readers' experiences of a text (32). Nuttall shows how CG can offer the best of both worlds: an inclusion of cognitive perspectives (catering to the ‘cognitive turn’ in stylistics) without “losing light of the linguistic grounding of stylistic analysis” (27).

Another aspect in which the book takes a best-of-both-worlds approach is in its assumed readership: readers are ideally familiar with both linguistic and literary analysis. In the two chapters introducing the concepts of ‘mind style’ (Chapter Two) and ‘cognitive grammar’ (Chapter Three), Nuttall skilfully unpacks a range of definitions of mind style for the reader and provides a broad

overview on the CG enterprise for those unacquainted with the approach. At the same time, she makes throwaway references to the Bakhtinian concepts of “*heteroglossia*” and “*dialogism*” as well as George Lakoff’s “*idealized cognitive models*” that a reader without extensive background in either field cannot follow (17, original emphasis; 34, original emphasis). I would not go as far as to say that a reader must possess expertise in literary and linguistic analysis, but throughout my reading of this book, I found it very useful to have a degree in both fields, as well as a special focus in Cognitive Linguistics; readers who do not might need to be willing to have Google at the ready to be able to follow some of the more advanced theoretical concepts Nuttall discusses.

Where Nuttall’s book really shines is in its application of the CG framework in an analysis of mind style in four selected novels: how syntactic structures contribute to the ‘stream of consciousness’ style narration of Offred in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) (Chapter Four); how lexical choices contribute to readers’ conceptualisation and knowledge of the fictional world in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) (Chapter Five); how transitivity effects impact reader’s attribution of agency and responsibility in Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (1954) (Chapter Six); and how conventional metaphors and novel similes create the dichotomy of the immersive and defamiliarizing reader experience in J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* (1962) (Chapter Seven). In exploring different aspects of CG analysis in these works of Speculative Fiction, Nuttall shows the impressive potential of her approach, not least in the fact that she is merely able to scratch the surface of the explanatory potential CG might harbour for Speculative Fiction and the analysis of mind style in fiction in general.

The almost overwhelming wealth of (syntactic) structures that could serve a cognitive stylistic analysis becomes apparent in the chapter on Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Nuttall introduces the CG concept of dynamicity, “the manner in which prominent components are processed, or scanned, by readers” (64). This concept distinguishes between sequential and summary scanning, inviting readers to immersively enact either a one-by-one or a holistic access to events of the novel. Linguistic choices – for instance Atwood’s frequent uses of lists – prompt sequential scanning and cause readers to enact the unavailability of a holistic understanding of the dystopian society of Gilead in a reading empathetic of Offred’s own focus on the “immediate circumstances” of her existence as a handmaid and her fragmented account of her own past (75). While Nuttall’s account of summary versus sequential scanning is compelling, she is tempted by the sheer volume of linguistic structures that support her interpretation. By including analyses of epistemic modality (a feature at the crossroads of morpho-syntax and semantics) and conceptual metaphors (a semantic feature), she strengthens her account of Offred’s mind style, but also – in straying away from purely syntactic analysis – loses some of the empirical rigor and focus that a CG analysis of stylistic structures benefits from.

The subsequent chapters on lexis, transitivity, and metaphor continue to offer excellent textual analysis and do a better job focusing on individual linguistic elements. By concentrating on a single stylistic aspect of the texts in those chapters, Nuttall succeeds not only in presenting compelling analysis, but her book also acts as something of a manual for cognitive stylistic analysis

using CG to illuminate various facets of individual features. In her treatment of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, she focuses on lexical choice and how foregrounding and backgrounding of information contributes to readers' knowledge or lack thereof. Particularly compelling is her account of how the novel's "highly cohesive," and therefore foregrounded, description of Hailsham – the English boarding school where students, who are in fact human clones, are reared to be later used for medical purposes – backgrounds or even buries the connection between carer and donor that drives the novel's narrative, essentially obstructing the reader's "understanding of the adult future that awaits these children" (109, 106). Nuttall demonstrates the lack of description of the donor and carer roles, contrasting it with the novel's lexically rich treatment of Hailsham; the reader's attention is guided towards the more lexically rich Hailsham reference chain, whilst their knowledge of carers and donors is occluded by a lack of lexical specificity. These structures contribute to readers' impressions of the narrator's mind style: readers develop "empathetic engagement" as well as a "sense of estrangement" towards a narrator who is both a victim of and complicit in the occlusion of information (116).

Focussing on transitivity structures – or action chains, to use CG terminology – Nuttall provides a systematic break-down of what (groups of) characters in *I Am Legend* are associated with what kind of role in action chains. For instance, the vampires in Matheson's post-apocalyptic horror novel "are most frequently profiled as a mover in relation to a spatial location or entity," or they are described in terms of their body parts, rather than themselves, acting as agents or movers, inviting a "diminished appreciation of [their] mental states" (138, original emphasis; 140). The argument Nuttall makes here is particularly convincing because of the scientific rigor with which she approaches it: clauses are classified and listed according to the type of action chain they construe, and the reader is shown at a glance the textual evidence foregrounding a type of construal. The book's treatment of transitivity structures thus hints at the kind of empirical objectivity possible through the meticulous application of well-defined CG concepts in cognitive stylistic analysis, and offers some guidance on how to conduct such an analysis.

The final case study on 'metaphor and mind' is concerned with the aspect of cognitive linguistics that has perhaps been most widely applied in stylistic analysis: conceptual metaphor theory. In her application of this well-explored concept to Speculative Fiction, Nuttall nevertheless provides a new perspective. By analysing conceptual metaphors in the post-apocalyptic world of Ballard's *The Drowned World*, she argues that because readers are aware of the text's nature as Speculative Fiction, their interpretation of metaphors becomes ambiguous: are they to be read metaphorically or literally as a part of the fantastical elements ubiquitous in the text? This "breakdown of the distinction between what is factive and fictive within the world described" is further explored by Nuttall's most innovative contribution here, namely her examination of novel similes (174). Similes, unlike metaphors, "[draw] attention to their metaphorical nature," and therefore in their very nature contribute to the reader's uncertainty of what is part of reality, and their impression of the novel as a "'hallucinatory' or 'dream-like' experience" (170, 174). This chapter then illustrates what can be gained from CG in cognitive stylistic analyses of Speculative Fiction specifically: the deviation underlying mind styles being ubiquitous in the 'physical and social environment' of these

novels means it offers a great playground for the application of even well-explored CG concepts like conceptual metaphors.

Nuttall's exploration of CG and mind style in Speculative Fiction points towards plenty of future avenues of application: the present study focuses on a group of novels that share certain characteristics in that they describe post-apocalyptic and/or dystopian worlds, but Nuttall's approach might also contribute usefully to analyses of other types of Speculative Fiction such as Fantasy or Utopian Fiction. The book's contribution to cognitive stylistics is undeniable, and it works wonderfully as a manual for future applications. In terms of its claim that the advantageous relation of CG and its application to Speculative Fiction works both ways, the current study has not quite managed to convince me. Nuttall certainly cannot be faulted for not recognising the potential: throughout her analyses, reader responses sourced from Goodreads.com are taken into consideration to help forge connections between stylistic features at the text-level – the 'bottom-up' perspective – and "readers' experiences of the texts" and the mind styles represented within them – the top-down' perspective (180). In the end, she does not quite succeed at having the two perspectives meet in the middle – and many before her have failed in this endeavour – as reader reviews in their holistic viewpoint lack the necessary internal validity to act as a piece of evidence for a connection to the specific stylistic features explored in the analyses. Nevertheless, Nuttall's approach to the 'bottom-up' perspective is a welcome and empirically sound contribution to the cognitive stylistic enterprise.

BIONOTE

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