SEM15. Italian approaches to stylistics

15A 12 September h. 14:00-16:00, S7 Moro
15B 13 September h. 8:30-11:00, S2 Moro

Convenors
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Abstract
Stylistics is the systematic study and analysis of texts, grounded in precise and comprehensive linguistic description, and characterized by a meticulous close reading and interpretation of the texts under examination. As a discipline within the humanities, stylistics is primarily concerned with the linguistic composition of texts and the central role of language in textual construction. Over time, the field has developed a robust theoretical framework along with a diverse array of linguistic and analytical methodologies that enable the critical, scientific, and systematic interrogation of not only language, texts, and textual meaning but also the interpretive contexts of readers. In this sense, stylistics extends beyond linguistic meaning-making processes and textual features to enlarge the focus to human subjectivity in order to examine the cultural and social ideologies, perspectives, and belief systems embedded within individual texts and their broader social and cultural frameworks.

Within this context, this seminar will explore how geopolitical, ideological, and ecological challenges and crises are represented in texts and discourses, as well as how these texts and discourses engage with, respond to, and critique such issues. Aligned with the objectives of the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) and the Centro di Ricerca Interuniversitario di Argomentazione, Pragmatica e Stilistica (ARGO), the seminar contributions will analyze a range of literary and non-literary texts, through the application of theoretical frameworks and methodologies advanced by contemporary stylistics. In doing so, the seminar will offer a comprehensive mapping of current stylistic approaches embraced by Italian scholars and the analytical methodologies presently employed within the Italian stylistics research community, reinforcing the integral role of stylistics within the humanities.

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SEM15. Papers

15A 12 September h. 14:00-16:00, S7 Moro
- *Ecostylistic approaches to landscapes* (Daniela Francesca Virdis, Università degli Studi di Cagliari)
- *The stylistics of healthcare discourse: transitivity, modality, and the representation of femininity in online patient information leaflets* (Annalisa Federici, Università degli Studi Roma Tre)
- *Stylistic mediation in news translation: Ethics in Italian journalism* (Eleonora Fois, Università degli Studi di Cagliari)
- *A new addition to the family? Introducing the theory and practice of postcolonial stylistics* (Esterino Adami, Università di Torino)

15B 13 September h. 8:30-11:00, S2 Moro
- *Neurodivergence, foregrounding, and narrative empathy in Flowers for Algernon: A stylistics-based reader-response study* (Piergiorgio Trevisan, Università degli Studi di Trieste)
- *"Thou shalt find that I exceed my sex": Styling female agency in Shakespeare* (Chiara Ghezzi, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)
- *Language and worldview in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: A computer-aided analysis of Mexican-Hispanic and Indigenous languages* (Giuseppina Balossi, Independent scholar)
- *Merging deixis: time, space and persona in 4.48 Psychosis* (Mariaconcetta Mirto, Università di Napoli L'Orientale)

A new addition to the family? Introducing the theory and practice of postcolonial stylistics

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Stylistics is a robust and vast scientific domain that keeps growing like a family, spanning both traditional and innovative disciplinary areas and methodologies, such as (im)politeness and ecolinguistics, all of which have received much attention from the Italian research community (Del Villano, 2008; Virdis, 2023). My contention is that to such a list we should add postcolonial stylistics (Adami 2025), which aims to fruitfully integrate stylistic frames, such as foregrounding, cognitive metaphor and modality, and postcolonial theories, like Orientalism, mimicry and hybridity. Such a timely project recognises the importance and scholarly production of the two fields, especially in the Italian context. It also shows that postcolonial studies can be viewed as a key to understanding our complex contemporaneity, from a social, historical and even environmental perspective, given the pernicious link between the inheritance of colonialism and the current climate crisis (Zurru, 2025). However, the idea of postcolonial stylistics is not simply a possible application of linguistic analysis to less critiqued texts, but it is part of a political reflection and social commitment within a "radical move" (Stockwell 2023), as both stylistics and postcolonial studies pivot around on the interconnection between human beings, identitarian values and powerful discourses, often addressing and denouncing cases of inequality, racism and marginalisation (Dawson Varughese, 2012; Tunca, 2014).

     This paper intends to discuss how merging stylistics and postcolonial studies can contribute to the critical study of the humanities today because, on the one hand, stylistic analysis guarantees a high degree of 'rigour, retrievability, and replicability' and, on the other, working with postcolonial texts allows to consider non-canonical and non-western narratives and concepts. The talk accords with the stylistic manifesto illustrated by Carter and Stockwell (2008) that try to encourage scholars to be "eclectic", "holistic" and "evangelical", and offers a preliminary investigation of two recent non-fictional postcolonial texts: 'Youth' by Gibraltarian writer Mark G. Sanchez, and 'On structure' by Chinese-Canadian author Madeleine Thien. Put differently, this paper illuminates the expansion of the 'family' of stylistics as we critically look at the (language of the) present age, and its discontents.

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Language and worldview in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*: A computer-aided analysis of Mexican-Hispanic and Indigenous languages

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This paper investigates the intersections of Western and Mexican worldviews in *Under the Volcano* (1947) through Malcolm Lowry's use of language — specifically Spanish, Mexican Spanish, and Nahuatl, one of the Uto-Aztecan languages of Mexico. The analysis examines how these languages function as linguistic markers of culturally shared or divergent understandings between the novel's Western characters and the local people, and how these understandings are conceptualized and represented from differing perspectives.

     The first part of the paper identifies, through statistical analysis, the lexical elements that connote the physical and human environment of Cuernavaca: toponyms that contribute to creating Lowry's apparently precise and realistic style,

and Hispanic-Mexican or Nahuatl terms — some lacking English equivalents—that help establish a vivid sense of place and characters.

The second part of the paper focuses on its central concern: the contrasting worldviews of European and indigenous characters. It explores, through concordances and samples extracts, linguistic phenomena such as code-switching (*e.g.* tag-switching, intrasentential and intersentential switching, and intra-word switching), authentic conversations, borrowings from literary and historical sources (*e.g.* "No se puede vivir sin amar" (Fray Luis de León: 1527–91), as well as a variety of language registers (*e.g.* "the Oficina Principal of the Compañía Telegráfica Mexicana Esq., San Juan de Letrán e Independencia, México, D.F.," from a realistic-sounding telegram). Together, these linguistic elements create a complex and idiosyncratic representation of the Western-Anglo-American characters' socio-cultural reality, highlighting the role of language in constructing identity and worldview.

The analysis draws upon Linguistics, Cognitive Stylistics, Corpus Linguistics, and Anthropology. Computer-assisted methods facilitate a systematic linguistic analysis of the Mexican-Hispanic and Nahuatl lexis, and their co-textual analysis interpreted through the worldview theory, although these are only a few of the many intertextual features in the novel that offer rich opportunities for further exploration of worldview in *Under the Volcano*.

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The stylistics of healthcare discourse: transitivity, modality, and the representation of femininity in online patient information leaflets

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Nowadays, there is a growing body of work employing corpus methods to conduct stylistic analyses of non-literary texts, supporting the argument that restricting stylistics to the study of literary texts alone is reductive. For instance, Price has effectively shown that "stylisticians interested in the language of health and illness might usefully apply methods from corpus stylistics […] to health communication data" (2023, 560). Furthermore, discussing corpus stylistics in relation to health communication, Price notes that the definition of this relatively recent subfield of stylistics remains under debate. While some scholars describe corpus stylistics as the application of corpus methods to the analysis of literary texts, McIntyre and Walker define it as "the application of theories, models and frameworks from stylistics in corpus analysis" (2019, 15). In other words, the focus of corpus stylistics lies in investigating stylistic questions across a variety of texts, rather than merely analysing literary texts using corpus methods. Viewed in this way, corpus stylistics emerges as a recognisable field in its own right, given that stylistic concerns can significantly enrich corpus linguistic enquiry. Drawing on this theoretical and methodological background, the present paper aims to illustrate how corpus evidence can be used to address stylistic questions in healthcare informational material publicly available online. Combining quantitative methods from corpus linguistics (Adolphs et al., 2004; Atkins & Harvey, 2010) with qualitative methods from stylistics (Solly, 2015; Demjén & Semino, 2021), it shows how healthcare discourse can be fruitfully examined from a (corpus) stylistic perspective. In particular, this study offers a stylistic analysis of the role played by transitivity and modality in the discursive representation of femininity within a corpus of eighty-four patient information leaflets available on the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists website (https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-all-patient-information-leaflets/). The aim is to examine the linguistic choices through which female subjects are construed and notions of female health and well-being are conveyed. Analysis of these healthcare texts reveals a number of recurrent

stylistic features and discursive strategies, notably the widespread use of epistemic and boulomaic modal expressions to minimise imposition and deliver medical knowledge/advice in non-peremptory ways, as well as the predominance of Relational and Mental processes over other process types in non-modalised verbs. In these samples of healthcare communication, such linguistic traits signal how leading figures in the healthcare system provide medical guidance and information that enables female subjects both to understand typical conditions associated with various life events (e.g. disease, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause) and to make informed decisions concerning their health.

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Stylistic mediation in news translation: Ethics in Italian journalism
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Translation is closely linked to stylistics, which concerns itself with how a text means rather than merely what it means—an insight that is essential to translation (Boase-Beier, 2014). Style plays a central role in how journalistic writing constructs meaning and cultural representations of people and places (Riggs, 2020). News translation operates similarly: narratives may be reshaped or distorted, and public opinion influenced, sometimes exacerbating international tensions. In the 21st century, public trust in journalism has declined, partly due to the spread of disinformation and biased reporting. Yet, the role of translation remains opaque, as does awareness of the implications of cultural and textual mediation. First, the translating agent significantly shapes the framing and narrative of translated news. Second, the lack of transparency surrounding the translator's identity complicates accountability and raises questions about who bears responsibility for ideological shifts or factual distortions (Fois, 2022). Third, recontextualisation is influenced by the need to align content with the ideological and stylistic preferences of editors and target readers. This may introduce bias, especially in direct quotations and other ostensibly objective textual elements, thus raising ethical questions about meaning and intent. The shift toward cross-platform journalism—where content is adapted for diverse audiences across multiple media formats—intensifies these challenges.

This paper investigates such issues in the context of Italian cross-platform journalism, focusing on the coverage of the re-emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Given the topic's deep cultural specificity, it demands high levels of intercultural sensitivity and stylistic awareness in translation.

The analysis draws on foreign affairs coverage, where translation of sources is indispensable. However, entire articles and related social media posts will be examined to capture how recontextualisation and framing operate from an ethical standpoint. Italian outlets were selected based on their inclusion in the Reuters Digital News Reports (2020, 2021) with a trust score of at least 65%.

The qualitative analysis is informed by theories of language in use to show how stylistic choices, power dynamics, and cultural norms shape translation and affect meaning reception. Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) provides a framework to investigate attitudes and stances in recontextualised texts; Pragmatics and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 2002) offer insight into recontextualisation processes. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Machin & Ledin, 2018) will be used to examine extra-verbal elements typical of cross-platform journalism.

The analysis will offer critical insights into how stylistic and editorial choices in translation shape the ethical positioning of cross-platform journalism, particularly in representing culturally sensitive issues.

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"Thou shalt find that I exceed my sex": Styling female agency in Shakespeare

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Over the past few years, Shakespearean stylistics has extended its scope towards a more pragmatic dimension, investigating the linguistic context of historical literary texts. The present contribution aims to further explore this field. Using both stylistics and pragmatics as methodological frameworks, the study focuses on foregrounded features and rhetoric modalities – speech acts, shading, figures of speech and (im)politeness – in order to categorise the linguistic patterns of female agency in Shakespeare, to understand whether and how these women are able to break through their ceremonial state and expected passivity to become acting characters.

In his first tetralogy – *Henry VI Part 1*, *2*, *3* (1588-1592) and *King Richard III* (1591-1594) –, Shakespeare not only reconstructed the historical rise to power of notorious male characters, but also depicted the alluring dramatic portraits of mighty women prone to rule and fight. Whether they are unintentional victims of their passions or vengeful viragos defending justice, Shakespearean leading ladies share some marked linguistic strategies in their discourses of power.

Caught between subversion and submission, unruly invectives and expected silences, the women of the tetralogy – Joan of Arc, Margaret of Anjou, Anne Neville and Elizabeth Woodville – share different destinies and discursive valency in the great scheme of the plot.

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Merging deixis: Time, space and persona in *4.48 Psychosis*

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On the verge of the XXI century, Sarah Kane wrote what Micheal Billington described as "a 75-minutes suicide note" (30 June 2000): *4.48 Psychosis* (Kane, 2002) was staged at Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on the 23rd of June 2000, one year and four months after Kane committed suicide hanging herself in her room at King's College Hospital; the play is a complex puzzle of thoughts, dialogues and visions, coming together and constantly reassembling the identity of the speaking voice. The addressees (Jakobson, 1997) do not know the main character's name, and little – if none – is explained about her story, conferring to the text a layered texture where emotions, words, and images merge and expand at once; within the chaos of a fractured mind, the act of differentiating among past, present and future equals to get lost, only to find oneself projected in a web of merging timelines and spaces.

The aim of this proposal is to analyse deictic markers of time, space, and persona in one of the most famous quotes of the play, where different timelines – and spaces – are evoked and merge. The results will show how those pieces of different realities are channelled into the play to trigger the addressee's sensibility, blending (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) to generate new "here-s and now-s" where there is no difference between the I-speaking and the perpetrators of several acts of violence – from genocide to sexual children abuse, to psychological violence. In *4.48 Psychosis*, the

identity is fragmented and never finds it wholeness again, and, instead of closing the faults, it opens them up even more through the recollection of human cruellest instincts: as for *Blasted* (Kane, 2002), the seed of mass violence blooms in the soil of little, private acts of violence, but where in her first work it was an escalation, in her last play it is presented as an interiorized plunge that departs from the collective memory of the Nazi's terror and lands in the present time of an ill mind.

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Neurodivergence, foregrounding, and narrative empathy in *Flowers for Algernon*: A stylistics-based reader-response study

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While the topic of narrative empathy is gaining increasing attention in both theoretical and empirical research within the humanities, there remains much to explore regarding how readers engage empathically with fictional characters. In particular, unconventional, unreliable, or idiosyncratic characters—especially those who deviate from social norms (Bonasera, 2023) or exhibit neurodivergent traits (Trevisan, 2023)—offer a compelling case for investigating the dynamics of reader-character empathy. These figures often challenge conventional identification patterns, prompting readers to negotiate more complex emotional and cognitive responses.

Research in stylistics has helped clarify the relationship between textual features and readers' empathetic responses, thereby offering insights into how narrative empathy is experienced (cf. Fernandez-Quintanilla and Stradling 2023). Among such features, foregrounding—the use of stylistically marked language to disrupt habitual perception—has been extensively examined in empirical studies on affective reader response (Hakemulder, 2004; Fialho, 2007; Van Peer et al., 2007; Kuzmičová et al., 2017). These studies suggest that stylistic salience may heighten emotional engagement and stimulate reflective or transformative reading experiences.

Building on this research, the present study investigates the role of literary style—particularly foregrounding—in shaping readers' empathic engagement with unconventional characters. It focuses on a survey-based analysis of reader responses to *Flowers for Algernon* (1959), the well-known science fiction short story by Daniel Keyes. Despite its widespread popularity and frequent inclusion in educational settings, the emotional and empathic impact of this story has received limited attention from stylistic and linguistic perspectives.

This study aims to test whether foregrounded features enhance readers' empathic responses to a text narrated by an unreliable and neurodivergent character. We hypothesize that participants exposed to the original version of the story, which retains a high degree of foregrounding, will report stronger emotional and empathic reactions than those who read a stylistically manipulated version with reduced foregrounding.

In this talk, I will present the results of this empirical investigation, drawing on data from 80 participants.

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Ecostylistic approaches to landscapes
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Moving from the results achieved in recent research (my latest book-length study and the volumes I edited or co-edited), this presentation discusses ecostylistic approaches to landscapes and nature as represented in literary and non-literary discourse. Theoretically, the presentation introduces the terms and theories in the discipline of stylistics which can be applied in ecostylistic analysis, namely, foregrounding, point of view, metaphor and framing, lexical choices, collocation, compounding, semantic crescendo, corpus stylistics. Analytically, the presentation examines five case studies belonging to as many different text types, that is, environmental website, pornographic novel, academic lecture, tourist web portal, magazine article. The main research purpose of this study is twofold: 1. To investigate the ecostylistic strategies utilised to produce a sample of texts treating landscapes and nature; 2. To identify the ideologies and agendas underlying these texts. Furthermore, and above all, this presentation would like to inspire us to reconsider who we are and to reformulate our ecological and social priorities. The presentation falls within the disciplinary aims and scope of ecostylistics, and is relevant to such neighbouring areas as ecolinguistics, ecocriticism, discourse analysis, environmental communication, and the ecological humanities as a whole.

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