

## A corpus-informed study of the narrative of Mary Prince

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### Abstract

Drawing from Halliday's (2004) account of Systemic Functional Grammar and Hoey's (2005) theory of Lexical Priming this paper suggests a critical method of examining the language used by the subaltern to talk about their experiences. The first section discusses how the linguistic theories outlined above might be used to explicate key concepts in postcolonial studies relating to the voice of the subaltern subject. The second section uses corpus methods to carry out the type of linguistic analysis being proposed. Taking KNOW as an example, it is suggested that the use of verbs in the narrative of Prince, when analysed within the framework that is being suggested, can reveal something not only about how Prince construed events and perceived the world, but can also reveal something about the social and ideological systems which, through discourse, helped to construct those experiences and operated to suppress her.

Keywords: *systemic functional grammar; lexical priming; corpus linguistics; subaltern studies; hegemony; Mary Prince*

### 1 Introduction

In this paper I intend to carry out a linguistic analysis, using corpus methods, of the narrative of Mary Prince, a female West Indian slave, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Slavery, by definition, is a coercive act of control however for colonialism (the ideology within which slavery operated) to become a dominant world-view it would have been consistently reinforced through, what Gramsci<sup>1</sup> describes as, consensual, or hegemonic, means of social control, whereby marginalised and suppressed peoples are encouraged to accept the ideas and values of the dominant classes (Ransome, 1992). Gramsci recognised language as being one such form of hegemonic control, arguing that the discursive processes used by those in power transcend society, influencing the way in which subordinated peoples perceive and act in the world (see Forgacs, 1988 and Forgacs and Smith, 1985). Hegemonic control through language works in subtle, pervasive and unremarked ways, often going unnoticed by those being suppressed; the controlling mechanisms are so embedded in everyday language that they are consistently reinforced.

On a theoretical level, the concept of language as a form of hegemonic control certainly appears to be feasible. If language 'provides the terms by which reality may be constituted [and if] it provides the names by which the world may be "known"' (Ashcroft et al., 1995: 261) it follows that the language used by the dominant classes will become the way in which reality is understood by the subordinated classes, affecting not only the way the latter speak, but also their conception of the world (Forgacs, 1988: 324 citing Gramsci). The problem is however more of an applied nature: *how* to analyse language as operating in this way. One method is to look at the way in which language is used, by subordinated peoples, to talk about their experiences. For Scott, as will be discussed later in this paper, it is not possible to separate language and experience - language constructs identities, it '...position[s] subjects and produce[s]

their experiences' (1992: 25). The language used to talk about experience, therefore, can reveal something not only about how the suppressed (or subaltern) subject construed events and perceived the world, but it can also reveal something about the discursive processes which helped to construct those experiences in the first place.

Experience, then, as argued by Scott, should not be viewed as authoritative evidence '...because [it is] seen or felt' (1992: 26), but instead should be viewed as something that is discursively constructed and, therefore, in need of critical analysis and explanation. What Scott does not appear to set out, however, is an objective and empirical method of linguistic or literary analysis which would allow for experience to be investigated in the way that she is proposing. Here, I would like to suggest that Halliday's account of Systemic Functional Linguistics (see Halliday, 2004) and Hoey's theory of lexical priming (see Hoey, 2005) might provide exactly the critical method of examining experience that Scott is calling for. These two linguistic theories, although coming from quite different perspectives (what is central to Systemic Functional Linguistics is the concept of choice<sup>2</sup> - the lexicogrammatical possibilities that '...allow [a] speaker to represent the world in a particular way' (Hunston, 2006: 65); whereas what is central to Hoey's theory is the idea that individuals are *primed* to use language in a certain way, therefore raising questions regarding the very notion of choice (see Hoey, 2006)), offer the possibility for a fuller understanding as to how language might operate as a form of hegemonic control.

This paper will be presented in two main parts. The first section will discuss the theoretical framework in which I intend to analyse the narrative of Prince. In this section I will suggest how the linguistic theories outlined above might be used to explicate key concepts in postcolonial studies relating to the voice of the subaltern subject. The second section will focus on the narrative itself and will provide the kind of linguistic analysis that I am proposing. My aim, in this section, is to investigate (using corpus methods) what the narrative of Prince can tell us about a) how she construed her experiences and b) the ideological and social systems, which, through discourse, helped to construct those experiences and operated to suppress her.

Before continuing, I would like to add a brief note about the benefits of using computer assisted methods for literary analysis. As previously discussed, in attempting to restore histories from the perspective of the subaltern Scott calls for a critical method with which to examine and explain the language used to talk about experience. The linguistic theories suggested above certainly offer a framework which would enable this type of analysis however, as with any linguistic or literary investigation, the analyst must first select which features of the text to study. It is this element of subjectivity that is problematic for Scott as the experiences, beliefs, and world-view of the analyst will in some way influence the way in which a text is studied. In using corpus methods, however, the linguist is 'restricted to features [of the text] which the software can find' (Stubbs, 2005: 6). Although in literary analysis there is always the need for interpretation, by allowing the data to lead the investigation this at least goes some way to removing the subjectivity that Scott is concerned with.

## 2 Key concepts

An important issue in postcolonial studies is the question of whether it is possible to recover the voice of the subaltern subject. Gramsci, writing from a Marxist perspective, uses the term ‘subaltern classes’ to describe those groups ‘subordinated by hegemony and excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power’ (Holden, 2002).

For Gramsci, in order for a particular social group to gain (and maintain) power they must establish ‘...a form of social and political “control” which combines physical force or *coercion* with intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion or *consent*’ (Ransome, 1992: 135). Gramsci writes: ‘...the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as “domination” and as “intellectual and moral *leadership*”’ (Hoare and Smith, 1971: 45). Coercive social control, or ‘domination’, typically operates through the State (the legal and political constitutions which enforce discipline within a society). Consensual social control, which, as Gramsci argues, manifests itself as ‘intellectual and moral *leadership*’, derives from those institutions and practices associated with civil society (the Church, education, and political parties – provided those parties are not attached to the government). Although it should be stressed that ‘State’ and ‘civil society’ do not always operate exclusively, and coercive and consensual forms of social control can be found in both spheres<sup>3</sup>, the term hegemony is essentially used to refer to the intellectual, moral and cultural unity, or shared ideological world-view, which any group must establish if it is to gain (and maintain) power.

Hegemony, then, is a form of ideology. It is a method of social control achieved (primarily, but not exclusively) through *consent* whereby the dominant class endeavours to ‘...maintain control over the “hearts and minds” of subordinate classes’ (Miliband, 1982 cited in Ransome, 1992: 132) through ‘...gaining their support “voluntarily” by persuading them to accept and assimilate the norms and values of their [the dominant class’s] own prevailing world-view’ (Ransome, 1992: 135). The subaltern classes are those individuals or groups that are subjugated by hegemony, subordinated by the dominant world-view, and excluded from having any meaningful position from which to speak.

The term ‘subaltern’ was used by Gramsci to refer specifically to workers. In postcolonial studies the term has been used to refer to those individuals or groups dominated or oppressed by a more powerful ‘other’, within a colonised society. However, as Greenstein (1995) argues, the relationship between the *powerful* and the *powerless* is not a straightforward dichotomy (cited in Loomba, 1998: 238) and within a colonised peoples there will be ‘...several different discourses of power and of resistance’ (Loomba 1998: 239). This is, as pointed out by Loomba (1998), one of the reasons why, in O’Hanlon’s (1988) view, the subaltern should be analysed as an autonomous subject. O’Hanlon (1988) argues that one of the problems with orthodox historiographies is that they do not allow the experiences and oppositional consciousness of the *individual* to be heard: ‘In trying to write a history from below [that is from the perspective of the subaltern subject], the subaltern historian repeatedly constructs an essential...identity, not fractured by difference of gender, class or location’ (cited in Loomba, 1998: 241). O’Hanlon also points out that often national

elite groups are used to represent the ideas, experience, and voice of all subordinated peoples and little attention is given to the power relations that ‘...went on beyond the narrow circles of elite politics’ (1988: 122). Spivak, for example, referring to the *female* subaltern subject, argues that the multi-faceted way in which hegemonic control operates (Spivak refers specifically to the way in which colonialism often intersected with patriarchy) means that the voice of the (sexed) subaltern subject is fundamentally irrecoverable: ‘[i]f in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow’ (Spivak, 2006: 32). Loomba explains that for Spivak (1985) although ‘[e]lite native men may have found a way to “speak”’, self representation was simply not a possibility for those further down the hierarchy (Loomba, 1998: 234).

I would like to emphasise three points at this stage in my discussion. First, in postcolonial studies, the term ‘subaltern’ is not simply used to describe *all* colonised subjects, but it is used to ‘...draw distinctions *within* colonised peoples, between the elite and the non-elite’ (Loomba, 1998: 239). Second, and as O’Hanlon (1988) argues, in order to uncover the experiences and perspective of the subaltern, and to reveal something about the various layers of hegemonic control which operated to subjugate subordinated peoples, it is necessary for the subaltern to be analysed as an autonomous subject. Third, if, as argued by Spivak (1985), the voice of the subaltern is fundamentally irrecoverable, then it must be recognised that the postcolonial historian, or literary analyst, can, at best, only ever represent, or attempt to restore the history of, the subaltern subject.

This brings me to the question of how to represent, or restore the history of, the subaltern subject. For Scott, the *experiences* of the subaltern can provide ‘...evidence for a world of alternative values and practices whose existence gives the lie to hegemonic constructions of social worlds’ (1992: 24). Experience, then, can reveal an alternative history – a different perspective, however, Scott argues that rather than simply being ‘...evidence for the fact of difference’ (ibid.) experience should be explored in terms of how that difference was established in the first place – what were the social and ideological mechanisms that constituted subjects as different and constructed their experiences (1992: 25). One of the main ways in which subjects are constituted as different is through language (Scott gives the example of categories of representation such as man/woman, black/white (1992: 25)). As such, one way of exploring the experiences of the subaltern would be to try to understand ‘...the operations of the complex changing and discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced’ (Scott, 1992: 33) and through which subjects are positioned and experience is produced. To put it simply, language can reveal something not only about how the subaltern construed their experiences but it can also reveal something about the ideological and social systems which (through discourse) constructed those experiences to begin with. Scott stresses that as experience is ‘... always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation’ it should be examined and explained critically (1992: 37).

Language, then, reveals something about how the subaltern construed their experiences – it uncovers an alternative history, a different perspective and world-view. Language also reveals something about the ideological and social systems which helped to

construct those experiences – it reveals how subjects are positioned, how identity is constructed, and, therefore, how experience is produced. What is needed, however, is a method of investigating the experiences of the subaltern subject (as well as a critical language with which to talk about these experiences) which would allow for the identification and examination of the discursive processes that, as Scott puts it, ‘... position subjects and produce their experiences’ (1992: 25). To carry out this type of analysis I would like to suggest drawing from two linguistic approaches: systemic functional grammar (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004); and lexical priming (see Hoey, 2005).

Systemic functional linguistics views language as being made up of a network of systems with a system being ‘[a]ny set of alternatives, together with its condition of entry’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 22). For example, a clause can be either a statement or a question; if it is a question the Finite can come before the Subject (as with closed yes/no questions), or the Finite can come after the ‘Wh’ question word (as with open ended questions). In a very general sense we can say that a network of systems represents a network of choices and that each choice, as Halliday puts it, represents the ‘underlying potential of language’ (2004: 26 my emphasis) – ‘what *could go instead of what*’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 22). Meaning is found in the selections that are made at each point in the network of systems - each selection being viewed in the context of what ‘might have been meant but was not’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 24). These selections (or systemic choices) are, in turn, realised through the lexicogrammar. The lexicogrammar of a text therefore (text here refers to an instance of written or spoken language), when viewed as ‘...the outward form’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 23) of systemic choices, will reveal something not only about how the individual construed events and interpreted reality, but, to return to Scott’s argument, also offers the possibility of uncovering something about the discursive processes which position subjects and construct experiences to begin with (Scott, 1992: 25).

What this suggests is that a society (the English speaking society, for example) will have choices available to it to construe experiences in different ways (as discussed above, in systemic functional terms these choices are described as a network of systems).<sup>4</sup> To transform experience into meaning an individual will select from the network of systems available; and the selections that are made will depend on, amongst other things, how the event is construed. It is at the level of the *individual* that I would like to bring in Hoey’s theory of lexical priming. For Hoey (2005) the notion of choice is problematic: individuals do not *choose* from a network of systems but are instead *primed* to use language in a certain way, in certain contexts. The term ‘priming’ refers to the way in which words seem to attract certain grammatical and collocational environments as a result of ‘...the cumulative effects of an individual’s [personal and unrepeatable] encounters with [a particular] word’ (Hoey, 2005: 13). In other words, as an individual’s experiences of language are unique, so too will be their primings (Hoey, 2005: 11). This potentially creates problems – if an ‘...individual’s primings...differ too greatly from those of others’ (ibid.) then communication could not take place. To ensure that primings do not vary too much from individual to individual there are, in every culture, what Hoey describes as ‘harmonising mechanisms’ (2005: 181) in place: that is, mechanisms for ensuring the ‘...consistency of primings across speakers’ (ibid.)

– education arguably being the main one. Hoey’s concept of ‘harmonisation’ thus seems to complement Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Harmonisation can be viewed as a form of control not through coercive means, but through channels associated with civil society: education, media, and religion, for example; it is ‘...the exercise of power over the language of others’ (Hoey, 2005: 182) through consensual means. The individual, simply by using language in the way that they have been primed to use it, effectively reinforces the very power structures which they are suppressed by. Furthermore, an individual’s primings will also shape the way in which they perceive and experience the world.

I would like to stress that my aim here is not to propose too definite an argument but it is more to speculate on individual word use and overall themes. The suggestions that I have made are the result of a discussion that I had with Susan Hunston, the University of Birmingham, during which it became apparent that there are possible connections to be made between Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and the linguistic theories previously outlined. Society, it would seem, has choice – certain linguistic possibilities for construing events in different ways; the individual, in contrast, does not have choice – they are primed to use language in a certain way. The language used to talk about experience can reveal something not only about how the subaltern construed events and perceived the world, but it can also reveal something about how the subaltern was discursively positioned within society and indeed suppressed by the very language which she used to talk about her experiences. Halliday’s account of systemic functional grammar and Hoey’s theory of lexical priming offer a potential framework within which the voice of the subaltern subject can be critically analysed in this way. In the following section I will provide an example of the type of linguistic analysis that I am suggesting.

### **3 Data**

To carry out the analysis I created an electronic corpus of Prince’s narrative and, for the purpose of comparison, a corpus of the narrative of Ashton Warner, a male slave also from the West Indies. Both narratives were first published in 1831<sup>5</sup>. The corpora were part of speech annotated using Q-tag (Mason, 2003) and were analysed using the concordancing software WordSmith 4.0 (Scott, 1996).

### **4 Methods and Findings**

What is particularly noticeable about the narrative of Prince (and indeed other narratives of this type) is the obvious lack of explicit detail regarding the violent aspects of her oppression. When reading the text there is a sense that something is missing, that certain experiences cannot be recounted either because they are too painful, or because of social or religious constraints. This issue is addressed by Pouchet Paquet who discusses the extent to which it is possible to recover the voice of the female slave given the way in which the slave narrative was ‘tailored ...to the abolition of slavery’ by Methodist activists ‘who promise[d] truthfulness but not the whole unvarnished truth of rape, sexual abuse, and forced promiscuity that is the lot of the slave’ (2002: 32). Like Pouchet Paquet, I would argue that the social and religious constraints to which Prince was required to conform are just as much a part of her narrative as those details and

experiences that are clearly recounted; what *is not* said, arguably, reveals just as much as what *is* said. It was, however, because of this notable lack of detail regarding certain aspects of Prince’s oppression that I felt it was necessary to look beyond the *content* of the narrative to see what the *grammar* might reveal about Prince’s experiences and the power structures which suppressed her.

As discussed previously, in systemic functional linguistics the grammar of a language can be visualised as a network of systems (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 23). Each system represents a set of alternatives, which would suggest that in any language there are certain choices available for construing experiences in different ways. To put it simply, the way in which a person construes their world experiences will be organised by (and reflected in) the grammar. Halliday describes experience as consisting of ‘...a flow of events, or “goings-on”’ (2004: 170) and suggests that the grammar of a clause organises these ‘goings-on’ into participants (the things or people that are involved in the event); processes (the verbal group which tells us about the event); and circumstances (the adverbial or prepositional group which provides more detail regarding the ‘...time, space, cause, [and] manner’ (ibid.) in which the event took place) (see also Thompson, 2004). In systemic functional linguistics this is known as the system of transitivity.

In this paper I will focus on the use of processes within the Prince corpus. As previously mentioned the process represents the verb (or verbal group) of a clause. In the system of transitivity there are different process types for construing different experiences. Material processes, for instance, are those which relate to outer experience (‘what we experience as going on “out there”, in the world around us’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 170)) and usually describe an event or action, for example: *work*, *give*, and *go*. In contrast, mental processes are those which relate to inner experience (what we experience as going on inside ourselves, in the world of consciousness’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 170)) and usually describe emotions, thoughts or perceptions, for example: *see*, *know*, *think*. There are, in total, six categories of process type (material; mental; behavioural; verbal; relational, and existential).

I began my investigation by running a search to find the most frequent processes in both corpora.

Prince Corpus				Warner Corpus			
Process	Raw Frequency	Normalised per 1000	Type of process	Process	Raw Frequency	Normalised per 1000	Type of process
go	34	2.3	Material	get	15	1.6	Material
get	19	1.3	Material	take	13	1.4	Material
come	19	1.3	Material	make	13	1.4	Material
think	18	1.2	Mental: cognition	work	12	1.3	Material
say	17	1.1	Verbal	go	11	1.2	Material
know	19	1.3	Mental: cognition	give	10	1.1	Material
take	16	1.1	Material	see	8	0.9	Mental: perception
give	15	1	Material	bring	7	0.8	Material
see	11	0.7	Mental: perception	put	6	0.6	Material
keep	11	0.7	Material	wish	5	0.5	Mental: desideration

Fig. 1: Ten most frequent processes (base form only) in both corpora

From the above tables it appears that mental processes relating to cognition are more important in the Prince narrative than in the Warner narrative. Of the ten most frequent processes three are mental in the Prince narrative compared with two in the Warner narrative. The mental process *think* is the fourth most frequent in the Prince narrative whereas we have to go down to the seventh most frequent process in the Warner corpus to find a mental process – *see*. These initial results are, in themselves, quite revealing as they suggest a certain amount of cognitive awareness, reflection and introspection. The interiority that is expressed through mental processes of cognition and perception may potentially support Pouchet Paquet’s (2002) interpretation of Prince as a *witness* as well as a victim.

Having carried out this preliminary investigation I realised that my search had only produced the base form of the processes. It was therefore necessary to carry out a new search, but this time using the lemma (so that all forms of the process could be identified: take, takes, taken, took, taking, for example). The results were as follows:

Prince Corpus				Warner Corpus			
Process	Raw Frequency	Normalised per 1000	Type of process	Process	Raw Frequency	Normalised per 1000	Type of process
go	106	7.18	Material	say	51	5.54	Verbal
come	70	4.74	Material	go	47	5.11	Material
say	70	4.74	Verbal	take	37	4.02	Material
get	50	3.39	Material	get	29	3.15	Material
give	50	3.39	Material	make	28	3.04	Material
take	45	3.05	Material	tell	28	3.04	Verbal
think	41	2.78	Mental: Cognition	come	24	2.61	Material
see	39	2.64	Mental: Perception	know	24	2.61	Mental: Cognition
tell	36	2.44	Verbal	see	24	2.61	Mental: Perception
know	34	2.3	Mental: Cognition	give	23	2.5	Material

Fig. 2: Ten most frequent processes (all forms) in both corpora

What was interesting about this second search was that several of the processes which appeared to have a high frequency in their base form in the Prince corpus (when compared with the Warner corpus), did not show the same high frequency when a search of the lemma was carried out. KNOW, for example, although used more frequently by Prince in its base form, has roughly the same *overall* frequency in both corpora. This is perhaps more clearly highlighted by the following table:

KNOW	Prince		Warner		Difference in %
	Raw Frequency	Normalised per 1000	Raw Frequency	Normalised per 1000	
Base Form	19	1.3	4	0.4	225
All Forms	34	2.3	24	2.6	13

Fig. 3: Frequency of KNOW in both corpora

There is only a 13% difference in the frequency with which both Prince and Warner use KNOW (in all of its forms) however there is a 225% difference in the number of times that KNOW is used in its base form. In total Prince uses the base form 17 times compared with Warner who only uses it four times.

These findings raised the question of why some processes are used more frequently in their base form by one writer, and not by the other. I decided to investigate further those processes which are marked in terms of similarity and difference (i.e. those which have a similar *overall* frequency in both corpora (a difference of less than 50%), but which have significantly different counts in their base form (a difference of more than 200%)). KNOW, KEEP and SAY all met these criteria in the Prince corpus. In what follows I will focus on the process KNOW.

#### 4.1 Know

Using the concordancing function within WordSmith I carried out a search for all occurrences of KNOW in both corpora. Instances of KNOW being used to mean *acquaintance* were discounted and I focused on instances of KNOW meaning *knowledge of something*. The results have been summarised in the following table:

	Prince (34)	Warner (24)
<b>Negative structures</b>	<b>14</b> (10 of which refer to Prince herself not knowing)	<b>6</b> (3 of which refer to Warner himself not knowing)
<b>Positive structures</b>	<b>11</b> (6 of which refer to Prince herself knowing)	<b>14</b> (8 of which refer to Warner himself knowing)
<b>Causative structures</b>	<b>4</b> (in 2 of these instances it is Prince who is <i>made</i> or <i>caused</i> to know)	<b>1</b> (in this instance it is Warner who <i>causes</i> the people of England to know)

Fig. 4: Summary of the uses of KNOW in both corpora

In the Prince corpus approximately half of all instances of the mental process KNOW are used in negative statements. This would, in part, account for the high frequency of base forms in Prince's narrative, as negative structures often follow the pattern: *do/does/did + not + base form*. There are five instances of the structure *noun + did/do + not + know* in the Prince corpus and in all of these occurrences it is Prince herself that is in the position of Senser (the participant undergoing, or experiencing, the mental process):

- 1 and did what she could for me: **I don't know** what I should have done, or what would have become of me
- 2 who took me to my new home. **I did not know** where I was going, or what my new master would do with
- 3 I was free in England, but **I did not know** where to go, or how to get my living; and therefore, I did not
- 4 I could answer, for **I did not know** well what to do. I knew that I was free in England, but I did not
- 5 But **I** was a stranger, and **did not know** one door in the street from another, and was unwilling to

The Phenomenon (the thing which is '...felt, thought, wanted or perceived' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 203)) in each of these occurrences can be categorised into two

main groups: action and location. In lines 1 and 4 Prince describes a situation in which she did not know *what she should do* or *what action she should take*. There is a sense of powerlessness and passivity in these lines; lack of knowledge prevents Prince from being able to act. In lines 2, 3 and 5 Prince describes a situation in which she either did not know *where to go*, or *where she was*. There is certainly a sense of isolation in these lines. Prince experiences frustration and fear as she tries to negotiate strange and unfamiliar environments. In all of these occurrences there is a lack of clarity and a feeling of uncertainty.

In the remaining negative statements, in which Prince is positioned as Senser, the Phenomena of the processes are:

- a) if I had known Molly was not allowed to have a husband
- b) I went home again, not knowing what else to do
- c) but the hand of that God whom then I knew not
- d) I knew nothing rightly about death then
- e) I never knew rightly that I had much sin till I went there

In occurrence (b) Prince is again describing a situation in which she does not know what action to take. In three of these occurrences (c, d, and e) the Phenomena can be broadly categorised under the theme of religion. In (c) Prince is describing a time in her life before she knew about or understood God; in (d) she talks about not understanding the meaning and religious significance of death; and in (e) Prince describes how she did not realise that she was a ‘great sinner’ until she attended church. In all three occurrences (c, d, and e) KNOW is used in the past tense. Prince is reflecting on her life prior to discovering Methodism and there is a clear sense of life *before* and life *after* finding God - religion, for Prince, brings knowledge.

To summarise, the data showed that Prince uses KNOW in negative statements almost as frequently as she uses KNOW in positive statements (a ratio of 5:5 positive/negative). This in itself may not seem particularly significant however a study by Halliday (1993), which investigated the probabilities associated with certain grammatical choices (1993: 2), revealed that a speaker of English is 90% more likely to choose a positive statement than a negative one (a ratio of 9:1 positive/negative). This would suggest that Prince is using KNOW in negative structures proportionally more than one would expect. This is perhaps more clearly illustrated by the following chart:

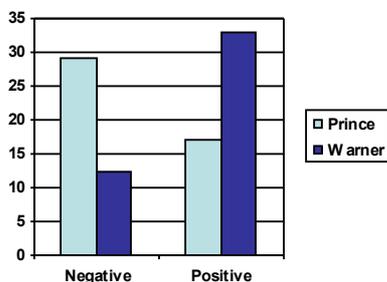


Fig. 5: Positive and negative counts of KNOW in both corpora

The chart shows that KNOW is much more likely to occur in a negative statement in the Prince corpus when compared with the Warner corpus. A typical utterance from Prince

is: *I did not know where/what*, whereas a typical utterance from Warner is: *I knew of/that/it/where*.

Turning now to the use of KNOW in positive statements, the data showed that in the Prince corpus only a third of all occurrences of KNOW (11 instances in total) are used in positive structures and out of these there are only six instances where Prince is in the position of Senser:

11 down for me. I have been a slave myself--I know what slaves feel--I can tell by myself what other slaves feel.  
12 I have felt what a slave feels, and I know what a slave knows; and I would have all the good people in England to  
13 season their yams and Indian corn. It is very wrong, I know, to work on Sunday or go to market; but will not God  
14 for I did not know well what to do. I knew that I was free in England, but I did not know where to go, or how to get  
15 and it was according to my strength. I knew that Mrs. Williams could no longer maintain me; that she was fain to  
16 I did not then tell my mistress about it; for I knew that she would not give me leave to go. But I felt I must go.

In lines 14, 15 and 16 KNOW is being used to project another clause (in systemic functional linguistics this is described as the 'idea clause' – the content of what is being thought or felt). What is noticeable in lines 15 and 16 is that the idea clause being projected is a negative statement:

- I knew that Mrs. Williams could no longer maintain me
- I knew that she would not give me leave to go

In both of these occurrences Prince is showing an awareness of what her mistress *is not able to do* or *will not do*.

In line 16 although the idea clause that is being projected is a positive statement: 'I was free', it is immediately followed by a negative statement: 'but I did not know where to go', suggesting that Prince has only a partial understanding of her environment:

- I knew that I was free in England, but I did not know where to go

What I would like to emphasise here is that even when KNOW is used in positive statements, what follows is often something negative. KNOW, in the Prince corpus, appears to attract a negative grammatical environment.

Lines 11, 12 and 13 are worth attention as these are the only instances in which Prince appears to be assertively claiming knowledge of something. The Phenomenon in each of these occurrences is not a *thing*, or a physical *act* (something which '...can be seen, heard [or] perceived' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2005: 205)), but it is, what is described in systemic functional linguistics as, a *fact* (something which is '...construed as existing in its own right in the semiotic realm' (ibid.)). In other words, what Prince is claiming knowledge of is not something which can be explained on a material or physical level, it is something much more abstract than that – a universal truth.

- a) I know what slaves feel
- b) I know what a slave knows
- c) It is very wrong, I know, (to work on Sundays)

What is interesting about occurrences (a) and (b) is that Prince appears to make no distinction in terms of gender. This is an inclusive and powerful voice whereby Prince

is aligning herself with, and speaking on behalf of, all slaves. Occurrence (c) requires more context:

It is very wrong, I know, to work on Sunday or go to market; but will not God call the Buckra men to answer for this on the great day of judgment – since they will give the slaves no other day.

Here Prince is claiming knowledge of what is right and wrong. This is quite a strong and defiant use of KNOW as Prince seems to be criticising the religious convictions of her oppressors. Religion, it would seem, gives Prince the knowledge, the language, and the power with which to challenge her oppressors. At the same time, however, there appears to be an acceptance of a hierarchy and there is no obvious anger towards God or her oppressors.

Finally, I would like to comment briefly on the use of KNOW in what I have described as causative structures.

22 I must pray to God to change my heart, and [make me to know](#) the truth, and the truth will make me free.  
23 more things than these; she [caused me to know](#) the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip,  
24 This is slavery. I tell it, [to let English people know](#) the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God,  
25 and I would [have all the good people in England to know](#) it too, that they may break our chains, and set us free.

In lines 22 and 23 Prince is either *made* to know something or is *caused* to know something. Although it could be argued that in line 22 Prince is in fact asking for this knowledge, the grammar of the clause in both occurrences suggests that she has no choice – knowledge is something which is given to, or forced upon Prince by a more powerful other.

## 5. Interpretation and conclusion

As discussed earlier in this paper, language, as a form of hegemonic control, operates in subtle and pervasive ways; its power lies in its ability to go unnoticed by those being suppressed. An example of this might be the way in which power and control is expressed through verbs. The high frequency of KNOW in negative statements in the Prince corpus (when compared with the Warner corpus) would suggest that Prince often finds herself in situations where knowledge is not available to her. She is either prevented from knowing something or she is made, or caused, to know something – in both cases, however, she does not have a choice.

Prince's perception of the world, her sense of self, seems to centre on what she *does not understand* or what she *cannot do*. It would appear that certain verbs (in this paper I have only focused on KNOW however the same is also true of other verbs) attract a negative colligational environment, which might suggest that Prince's personal encounters with language have primed her to use these verbs in this way. Prince is positioning herself (and her fellow slaves) as less powerful because she has less knowledge.

In this paper I have only focused on the process KNOW however I would argue that this initial investigation shows the benefits of carrying out this type of analysis. Taking as a starting point a simple numerical discrepancy, of no ideological interest, I was able

to move into representations of experience and how these experiences might reflect in some way the ideological and social systems which operated to suppress Prince.

This early analysis of the two bodies of writing indicates clear differences in process usage however there is too little data at this stage to make a positive statement and I would need to extend my analysis to a greater selection of process types. Even then, my research would only reveal something about Prince's own unique experiences and perception of the world. In order to situate Prince's narrative as belonging to a wider discourse, and in order to make any claims about the voice of the subjugated *female* subject, I would need to carry out similar studies on narratives written by other female slaves. However, to return to O'Hanlon's (1988) argument, in attempting to write histories from the perspective of the subaltern the starting point must always be at the level of the individual.

## **6. Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a political thinker and member of the Italian Communist Party. Writing within a Marxist tradition, he was concerned with the way in which the state establishes power through coercive and consensual forms of social control. His concepts are often applied in postcolonial studies to talk about the suppression of colonised peoples.

<sup>2</sup> Halliday does not suggest that an individual makes conscious choices, instead he describes choice as ‘...the analytic steps in the grammar’s construal of meaning’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 24). In this sense choice is viewed more as a set of alternatives – in using the passive voice, for example, a person is not using the active voice.

<sup>3</sup> Ransome gives an example of how coercive authority can operate within the religious practices of civil society: ‘In religious practice, for example, coercive authority operates along a spiritual dimension and is not therefore ‘physically’ violent. To a dissenting individual, however, the threat of excommunication or social exclusion may *in effect* be just as debilitating as physical punishment’ (1992: 143).

<sup>4</sup> Arguably, the systemic choices that are available in a particular language will in themselves reveal something about the ideological and social systems operating within that society – the fact that languages have different grammars would suggest that there are differences in the way in which the world is perceived by different cultures.

<sup>5</sup> Both texts were downloaded from the ‘Documenting the American South’ website: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>. This work is the property of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It may be used freely by individuals for research, teaching and personal use and has a collection of over 200 slave narratives that are available electronically.

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