

Can Semantic Prosody survive without Gricean maxims? A response to a contemporary critique of the diagnostic potential of SP

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Abstract

This paper is a response to a critique of Louw's treatment of semantic prosody (McIntyre and Walker, 2019; McIntyre, 2018). Firstly, it sets out to show that McIntyre and Walker's overview of corpus stylistics (2019) focuses exclusively on Louw's thinking prior to 2010 (deployment of corpus-derived subtext) and mainly on his 1993 paper. Such an approach may be pedagogically useful to those readers of McIntyre and Walker (2019) who need initiation into corpus stylistics, but it does little to no justice to Louw's Contextual Prosodic Theory (which goes unmentioned). Secondly, the paper brings into question the very critique of Louw (1993) in this source. Thirdly, the paper deals with the authors' proposed improvements on Louw's approach to explaining the mechanism of irony (Louw, 1993), specifically the implementation of Gricean maxims originally proposed by McIntyre (2018).

Key words: collocation, semantic prosody, Contextual Prosodic Theory, irony and insincerity

1. Introduction

Two publications have prompted this paper. The first, McIntyre (2018), is a chapter in an edited book, and as such it focuses on Louw (1993) full 25 years after its publication. While giving credit to Louw's ideas when it comes to the role of semantic prosody [SP] in detecting irony in texts, McIntyre offers three major improvements on SP in this role: utilizing Gricean maxims, paying particular attention to semantic preference, and calculating the MI score of the collocates of the node. The second publication is McIntyre and Walker (2019). Given the title and the number of pages of this academic monograph, its goal must have been to provide comprehensive explication and guidance in the field of corpus stylistics (“[...] we hope that the book may be valuable to undergraduate students, postgraduates and established researchers alike”, p. 20).

Monographs emerging from the auspices of prestigious publishing houses and entitled in this manner (*Corpus Stylistics: Theory and Practice*) are normally meant to serve as a reference point for both academics and practitioners.

It is perfectly normal academic practice that ideas voiced in McIntyre (2018) should have found their way into McIntyre and Walker (2019), and particularly Chapter 2 (“Using corpora to support qualitative stylistic analysis”). According to academic practice, however, there is a difference in impact between these two publications. A researcher’s point of view may be voiced in the edited chapter. When it comes to the academic monograph setting out to provide a comprehensive overview of a discipline, the authors’ stance on theoretical issues should be beyond dispute. As ‘beyond dispute’ is rarely achievable in science, the monograph should at least provide verified and verifiable information that the majority of informed readers would have agreed upon had they had access to relevant facts. My view is that McIntyre’s insights concerning Louw’s views on SP were transferred into the academic book too soon, without sufficient time passing for academic debate to take place and a consensus to have been reached. The goal of this paper is to cast doubt on those ideas, reflections and examples in both publications that have not been verified through debate, and might, if taken as a conclusive fact, misrepresent the work of Louw in the eyes of the average informed reader.

A discussion followed by examples and conclusions in an academic monograph of such calibre is supposed to have pedagogic implications and to serve as an example of how to conduct research. It is likely to be taken for granted rather than questioned, and to convey settled knowledge endorsed by a reasonable majority of experts. This paper will argue that McIntyre’s stance, though a useful step in discussing the relevance of SP in corpus stylistics, is not settled knowledge regarding the diagnostic potential of SP, and may not represent the final verdict of the academic community on the work of Louw.

Given that the paper discusses two interrelated publications, it will do so in two parts. Section 2 will talk about the more general stance on the work of Louw that is expressed in McIntyre and Walker (2019). Sections 3 and 4 will focus on the ideas that, albeit given plentiful space in McIntyre and Walker (2019), were previously published in the edited chapter (McIntyre, 2018). The latter publication, however, will be taken as the final version of the ideas expressed.

2 A critique of the overview of the work of Louw in McIntyre and Walker (2019)

It must be stated that there are very many references to Louw in Chapters 1 and 2 of McIntyre and Walker (2019), and very many of these references are those to Louw's 1993 paper. This in itself speaks of the significance attributed by the authors to the work of Louw in corpus stylistics. On the other hand, the majority of the references are to the parts of Louw's thinking which the authors find debatable. They would be within their rights were it not for two reasons. First and foremost, if an academic publication of such scope mostly takes issue with a scholar's work, the reader will naturally conclude that the scholar's shortcomings are more important than his contribution.

It is a question of balance. The authors do concede that Louw's contribution to the area of SP is very considerable, and there are a number of such disclaimers in both publications under discussion. However, if one were idle enough to make up a concordance of the name of Louw in the text, the overall semantic prosody would definitely be negative. In many instances, a view or a practice he is taken to advocate are refuted, each time through argument, and in many instances through examples. The reader is bound to feel that if Louw has mishandled so much in corpus stylistics, his contribution cannot be that considerable after all. And secondly, in the majority of such critical discussions, the authors' ideas are themselves debatable, in sharp contrast to very many insightful observations in other respects. This paper aims to take stock of such critical discussions in both publications.

The first references to Louw are to be found in Chapter 1, but they also very much pertain to the discussion in Chapter 2. My point of departure in this discussion is the authors' wording in the very first paragraph that 'Louw (1989) lays claim to having initiated corpus stylistics' (p.1). I believe that this attribution is questionable, especially given all the criticism of Louw in the book. May a scholar whose other work has engendered so much criticism express such claims, if so many of his other claims, according to the authors, are not correct? But the main issue here is the general semantic aura of the expression 'lay* claim to *ing *ed'. As a reader, it was not clear to me if the authors' stance (to which they have a perfect right, whichever it may be), was positively or negatively coloured. Is Louw entitled to such claims, or is he over-confident? What might be his foundation? The authors do not provide any references for this point of departure (which, to my mind, must be Louw 2008, given the year quoted, and that is an edited chapter in the same series as McIntyre 2018). Had they mentioned Louw and Milojkovic (2014), they would have referred the reader to a justification contained in the first section of that (CUP) publication. Had they

provided any reference of the two in existence, the ‘claim’ in question would have been more convincing to the reader. Hanging in the air, so to speak, the ‘claim’, to my mind, sounds unconvincing, and I fear Louw might even stand accused of appropriating what is not his, as could be the case with any unsupported claim.

Let me quote the testimony by Bill Louw. “The venue at which I first used computational methods was at St Hilda's College, Oxford, funded by The British Council and chaired by Professor Ron Carter. The proceedings were published in my case as a paper *Sub-routines in the Integration of Language and Literature*, British Council, Pergamon Press. Group work involved advanced attention to passages from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [...] I had access to 22 million words of running text. It was all on microfiche because storage on the PDP 11 mainframe computer was patchy. All of the twenty-five or so lexicographers at Cobuild, Westmere Birmingham University had the same full set of *all* concordances. The first edition of Cobuild dictionary ran on 7.5 million words; but was upgraded by scanning on a Kurzweil Data Entry machine to create supplementary corpora with a total of 22 million words. No person or institution had that much corpus data. LOB and Brown corpora were only worth one million words of running text each. I spent a year at Cobuild as a visiting scholar, and was present at their weekly meetings. They all knew I had discovered corpus stylistics [...] My claim is not extravagant at all” (Bill Louw, personal communication).

Additionally, as the authors claim that Louw ‘initiated the practice’ of corpus stylistics, not the use of the actual collocation ‘corpus stylistics’ (this distinction is made on p.1), Louw’s testimony is useful in setting to rights the issue of the collocation as well.

Do the authors themselves believe that Louw’s is a rightful claim? The following are the contexts of ‘lays claim to’ from the BNC (accessed in July 2023). My research question is whether the claim referred to in this manner is usually considered factual.

In my co-authored work with Louw, I often give the concordance of the node, and then I open the contexts of each line for the benefit of the reader. I do so in my oral presentations, and in those publications where the word count allows it (see Louw and Milojkovic, 2014: 269; Louw and Milojkovic, 2016). By the courtesy of PALA, in this publication I am allowed 6000 words, therefore here I attempt to provide enough co-text for the reader to grasp the meaning of each contextual reference, and hope they are willing to conduct their own search in the aforementioned corpus.

lays claim to (BNC)

1 The Conservative Conference: Thatcher **lays claim to** torch of freedom: Vision of Eastern Europe inspired by Tory' turning point in history'

2 England won comfortably enough, as indeed they ought to have done against a team containing 10 players whose ages ranged between 16 and 21, and one -Madan Lal - who **lays claim to** being 38, despite the strong suspicion that (were he as famous as Nehru)

3 Yet all these irritations fade away once the museum **lays claim to** the minds and emotions of its visitors.

4 presented to the public, and, apparently, to his friends as well. However, Mr Reich **lays claim to** one big scoop. He is able to reveal that Mr Cliburn's famous victory in Moscow was engineered

5 By using the formula, the speaker not only seeks to deflect criticism, but also **lays claim to** be a member of the moral community of the unprejudiced.

6 Two years of bloody, inter-tribal fighting. No end in sight. CHAD: Libya invaded Chad in 1988 and, despite being driven out by France, still **lays claim to** territory. WESTERN SAHARA: Polisario liberation movement lays claim

7 WESTERN SAHARA: Polisario liberation movement **lays claim to** former region now governed by Morocco leading to guerrilla warfare.

According to Louw's Contextual Prosodic Theory [CPT] (on which McIntyre and Walker 2019 remain silent, although it was initiated in Louw 2000, which is among the references), the writer's usage needs to be compared with those contexts in the reference corpus which share similar 'states of affairs' with the context created by the writer (Louw, 2010). Therefore, in this BNC concordance, line 3 may be disregarded, as the sequence 'lays claim to' is used in an altogether different situational context, with a different meaning (the museum is said to fully absorb the attention of the visitors). Lines 1 and 5 are sarcastic. Lines 6 and 7 are references to geographical borders: a country lays claim to a territory it does not formally occupy. Line 2 leaves me doubting, and the wider context available in the corpus is of little help. In line 4 the claim in question appears to be valid. Result: only in one to two contexts out of the seven is the agent entitled to the claim, or the claim is considered beyond dispute (the full context of line 2 available in the COCA is simply insufficient, as this was a passing reference on the part of the journalist).

However, McIntyre and Walker use the perfect gerund ('having initiated'). There appear to be two contexts in COCA in which this verb form collocates with 'lays claim to'.¹ I obtained it by searching for 'lays claim to *ing' and then manually locating the relevant ones:

1 The Chinese expeditions are led by Yuan Guoying, an ebullient professor of zoology from the Xinjiang Environmental Protection Institute (I call him the Professor). Joining the team again this time are Li Weidong from the same institute, a small-mammal researcher who doubles as an admirable cook; the Professor's twenty-nine-year-old son, Xiao Yuan, who acts as my interpreter; and the guide to whom we entrust our lives, Zhao Ziyun. A **25;936;TOOLONG who **lay claim to having shot** the last freeranging Przewalski's wild horse, " Old Zhao " has been crisscrossing the Chinese Gobi, both legally and illegally, since the 1970s. Photograph A herd in Mongolia's Great Gobi Reserve A: Animals believed to be wild camels roam this region, but escaped domesticated camels or their descendants may do so as well. DNA testing can help establish their biological differences and relationships. Photograph // With two jeeps and a supply truck, we establish a base camp in Hongliugou Valley, where we have arrangements to hire twenty domesticated Bactrian camels.

2 "Ferdurke was published in 1937, " Gombrowicz writes, " before Sartre formulated his theory of the regard d'autrui. But it is owing to the popularization of Sartrean concepts that this aspect of my book has been better understood and assimilated " (3:8). (n8) In Diary volume 3, he **lays claim to having similarly presaged** French Structuralism. Ferdurke predates Merleau Ponty (The Phenomenology of Perception), Elias Canetti (Crowds and Power), Georges Poulet (" Criticism and the Experience of Interiority "), and, most relevant of all perhaps, the philosophical thought of Emmanuel Levinas, in which the figure of the face occupies an absolutely central position, the place where ethics is manifested and where the Other cuts across the grain of Self.

These two contexts in COCA featuring the perfect gerund seem to indicate that the claim in question is a rightful one. On the basis of this scant evidence we may tentatively conclude that McIntyre and Walker believe that Louw's claim might have foundation.

This is supported by the subsequent discussion: according to the authors, two academics simultaneously started to apply computational methods to text: Burrows (1987) and Louw (1989) (pp. 11-12). The difference was that Burrows investigated a novelist's corpus, and Louw employed a reference corpus to the study of authorial text. Louw's personal testimony, mentioning 1987, confirms this. My concern is, as stated above, that the wording 'lays claim to having initiated' might not be properly understood by the reading public. However, since Louw, presumably unlike Burrows, has been vociferous in claiming to have founded the discipline as well as inventing the

collocation ‘corpus stylistics’, the academic community may now investigate the question and put the matter to rights in non-vague terms.

If Louw has been claiming to have discovered ‘corpus stylistics’, then it is not clear why the authors insist that he prefers the term ‘digital stylistics’. There is indeed a reference to this collocation in Louw (2008); however, given the bulk of his work and the oral and written references to corpus stylistics in it, ‘digital stylistics’ may now be seen as a reference made in passing. Apparently, Louw was much taken with the idea that stylistics can now stop being analogue in the sense of being traditionally intuitive. But, in 2019, we read such a meticulous discussion of the faults of the term ‘digital stylistics’ (p.5) that we are led to believe that Louw very much insisted upon it all until the moment of the monograph’s publication. ‘It is because of the problematic all-encompassing nature of the term *digital* that we prefer to avoid it in relation to stylistics’, write the authors (ibid.). I am not convinced that this discussion should have occupied a full half of a page, given Louw’s first authorship of the John Benjamins monograph *Corpus Stylistics as Contextual Prosodic Theory and Subtext* (Louw and Milojkovic, 2016). On the other hand, Louw’s *Contextual Prosodic Theory*, as well as Louw’s *corpus-derived subtext*, do not get a single mention in McIntyre and Walker (2019).

I agree with MacIntyre and Walker’s critique concerning Louw’s (2011) disapproval of *schema*. The corpus data, albeit plentiful, do not cancel the very notion of *schema*. And given Louw’s disapproval of cognitive linguistics, this critique is relevant to Chapter 1. What baffles me is the complete absence of references to Louw’s work published after the year 2011 in a 2019 monograph. As stated earlier, Contextual Prosodic Theory [CPT], launched in Louw (2000) and refined in his many subsequent publications,ⁱⁱ does not get a single mention. Instead of this, the major publication discussed in the volume is Louw (1993). I agree that discussing it in a corpus stylistic textbook has pedagogical value. But placing such emphasis on Louw’s early groundbreaking paper implies that since, during 25 years, he has not refined his thinking. Editors and writers of reference books owe every author under discussion a duty of care.

Furthermore, Louw, on the basis of an interpretation of his 1993 paper, stands accused of faults he never committed. For example, on p. 47 Louw is accused of studying concordance lines without opening their contexts. ‘With regard to line 1, for example, it is not clear why ‘bent on defending themselves’ should be evaluated negatively. At the very least, more context is needed to determine the subject of the verb phrase and what they are defending themselves against’ (p.

47). To me, having to defend oneself may be interpreted as negative enough. Much more crucial is the idea that Louw founded *Contextual Prosodic Theory* (my emphasis) in Louw (2000), and he never thought of opening contexts. A theory cannot be termed contextual if the relevant contexts discussed are unclear. Louw is certainly at fault for not stating clearly in 1993 that contexts should be opened in case the implication is unclear. Such a lack of clarification is sometimes present in a ground-breaking paper, when there is so much to say. But our subsequent publications (especially Louw and Milojkovic, 2016) have made this claim redundant. In a serious study, every context of every concordance line should be opened, without exception, ‘clear’ and ‘unclear’ alike, to avoid the subjectivity mentioned by the authors (p. 38).

The same objection applies to McIntyre and Walker’s criticizing Louw for dividing semantic prosody into positive, negative and neutral, regardless of specific prosodies (p. 48). The authors call it “something of an oversimplification”. I would call it downright silly. My very first paper (Milojkovic, 2011) discussed Philip Larkin’s authorial corpus, noticing specificities of SP (see also Milojkovic, 2012). To anyone dealing with text the specificity of SP is immediately obvious. Even if Louw had stood guilty of these faults in 1993, by 2019 it should have become abundantly clear that this is no longer the case. Criticising an author’s 25-year old paper while ignoring subsequent important publications testifying to the contrary is regrettable academic practice if this takes place in an overview of the whole academic discipline under discussion.

What should have led McIntyre and Walker to conclude that Louw advocates nothing of the sort is *Semantic Prosody*, a chapter in the Cambridge Handbook of Stylistics (Louw and Milojkovic, 2014), and *Corpus stylistics as Contextual Prosodic Theory and Subtext* (Louw and Milojkovic, 2016). These publications describe Louw’s complex thinking in stylistics, including the corpus-derived subtext of grammatical strings, theoretically founded on Russel and Wittgenstein (Louw and Milojkovic, 2016; Milojkovic, 2020). If his thinking is incorrect, the authors should have refuted it.

Instead, their silent implication is that what Louw writes is not corpus stylistics, but corpus-informed stylistics. This is not formally stated, but Louw (1993) and semantic prosody generally are discussed in Chapter 2, its locus being corpus-assisted, or corpus-informed stylistics. These are the definitions given: “using pre-existing large-scale corpora to support the stylistic analysis of single texts or textual extracts. For people new to corpus stylistics, one of the most straightforward ways of beginning to integrate corpus methods and stylistic analysis is to use such existing large

corpora to support or challenge an intuitive response to a text [...] In explicating corpus-informed stylistics, we pay particular attention to the concept of semantic prosody” (p. 26, my emphasis). Co-existence of Louw (1993) with the definition of this ‘straightforward’ method suggests that Louw is, in 2019, in a sort of waiting room leading to corpus stylistics proper, a kind of perpetual beginner.

The readers are not told that the *Handbook of Stylistics* (Simpson, 2014) quotes Louw and Milojkovic (2014) as an example of corpus stylistic analysis, or that Wang and Humblé (2017) in their review in *Style* praise the book as belonging to corpus stylistics:

Based on a synthesis of the theoretical tools of CPT (i.e., collocation, semantic prosody, and subtext), Milojkovic analyzes the logical construction of literary worlds as well as a hitherto uncharted domain in corpus stylistics: authorial intention, that is, whether the author sincerely means what he or she writes. Chapter 8 reveals the subtext of “in the * of” in a translated poem of Pushkin as a picture of action verging on conflict, which inspires Milojkovic to probe into whether this is an incompatible grammatical pattern to express Pushkin’s call for resignation. Methodologically, the application of CPT in translation studies enriches the theoretical toolkit of corpus-based translation studies. Chapter 9 distinguishes inspired writing from banality by evaluating the deviation from the reference corpus. Chapter 10 puts forward the hypothesis that inspired writing will differ from uninspired in the density of its subtextual and prosodic clashes, and that the clashes themselves will be indicative of the presence of inspiration (274). (*Style*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2017), pp. 550-555).

The readers are likewise not informed that corpus-derived subtext (see Louw 2010 and all subsequent publications) is defined as the list of quasi-propositional variables within and around a grammar string that is used to deepen our understanding of authorial meaning. Grammar strings are opaque to intuition and therefore cannot verify hunches, i.e. intuitive responses. Even in 2019, the verdict of the scientific community on Louw’s subtext was long overdue (at least since Louw and Milojkovic, 2014), if the passage above cannot be construed as such a verdict. In any case, Louw’s method clearly cannot be equated with the uninitiated researcher’s verification of hunches.

Moreover, corpus-driven corpus linguistics (the school of thought from which Louw's thinking emerged) disapproves of hunches on a theoretical basis: raw data is analysed without preconceptions (Milojkovic, 2019: 4).

As things stand, it seems to me that the authors have not read Louw but have been reading *about* Louw. For example, they share Stewart's (2010) misconception that while Sinclair viewed SP as a unit of meaning, Louw analyses it as a property of the word. In any case, to them, Louw (2000) "makes no clear reference to the fact that semantic prosodies belong to units of meaning and not individual words" (p. 46). What both overlook is Louw's interpretation of Larkin's 'days are' (Louw, 1993).ⁱⁱⁱ It is reminiscent of the notion of subtext, as this is a lexico-grammatical collocation. Given that Louw in 2010 initiated the discussion of grammar strings deepening interpretation of text ('logical semantic prosody – subtext', explicated at length in both Louw and Milojkovic 2014 and Louw and Milojkovic 2016), the debate regarding units of meaning seems resolved.

But the reader has been wondering what became of Gricean maxims.

3 Semantic Prosody and Grice's Maxims in McIntyre and Walker (2019)

Both publications referred to in this paper (McIntyre 2018 and McIntyre and Walker 2019) offer their contribution to Louw's view on semantic clashes as indicative of irony by hypothesising that the analysis should be assisted by implementing Gricean maxims.^{iv} They quote a comical sketch to illustrate their views:

Then America and Russia asked if they could join in, and the whole thing turned into a free-for-all. And so, unavoidably, came peace, putting an end to organised war as we know it (Bennet et al. 1987: 78).

It is suggested in both publications that the ironic effect in the sequence 'so, unavoidably, came peace' cannot be fully explained on the basis of the semantic clash alone: the analysis must be supported by the maxims of quality and manner (Grice 1975). Namely, the combination of 'peace' and 'unavoidably' flouts the maxim of manner, and the suggestion that peace 'came' is in breach of the maxim of quality.

The Gricean maxim of manner is applicable to utterances which are obscure, ambiguous, verbose or incoherent. But the statement under discussion does not fall under any of these categories. It is simply ironic. The investigator may be assisted by the corpus data in order to explain the mechanism of irony, but the maxim of manner is not helpful. Furthermore, ‘irony is categorised by Grice as a breach of the maxim of quality – therefore, as insincerity with a conversational implicature resulting in an ironic effect. This link between irony and insincerity inadvertently supports the main premise of Louw (1993)’ (Milojkovic, 2019).

As to the idea that peace ‘came’, the authors hold the view that it flouts the maxim of quality: ‘Despite the fact that *peace* is the agent of the clause, the statement that peace came unavoidably cannot possibly be true (the state of affairs must have come about as a result of human intervention to some degree)’ (McIntyre and Walker, 2019: 50).

Naturally, peace treaties are signed by human agents. But the language norm is created by ordinary people, not political elites. Ordinary people cannot influence the course of history. The BNC concordance of ‘came NOUN’ (excluding human agents, idiomatic expressions and random combinations) suggests a significant transition: came time (7), came news (5), came death (3), came reports (3; cut-off point). According to the wider contexts, the SP of ‘came news’ and ‘came reports’ is negative.

To ordinary people, the coming of peace is a transition that they cannot control. The statement in question, therefore, is not untrue. ‘Co-occurring with “unavoidably”, “peace” falls into the category of negative transitions, which intensifies the subtle irony in Alan’s wording’ (Milojkovic, 2019).

4 Semantic preference and MI score

My final objection to the criticism of Louw’s work on semantic prosody in McIntyre and Walker (2019) is the view that Louw ‘appears to run together the notions of semantic prosody and semantic preference’ (p.47). I can confirm that in the whole course of my work on English and Russian contexts I have always established semantic prosody without first verifying the existence of semantic preference in the concordance under discussion. The existence of semantic preference, to me, was part of an indication what specific semantic prosody may obtain in the given concordance. A justification can be found in Philip (2009: 4), who states that ‘the phenomena described by semantic prosody are all rather abstract and intangible aspects of meaning which are

more difficult to describe effectively than is, say, the allocation of collocations to lexical or semantic sets in order to identify the semantic preference'. Quoting Sinclair's observation that '[t]he semantic prosody of an item is the reason why it is chosen, over and above the semantic preferences that also characterize it' (1998: 19), Philip explains

the connection between language and the context of situation, which comprises the interaction of:

- A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
 - (i) The verbal action of the participants.
 - (ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.
- B. The relevant objects.
- C. The effect of the verbal action. (Firth 1957: 182)

Thus semantic prosody is not discernable from the words of a lexical item alone, but requires those words to be used by a particular set of participants to obtain a particular effect relative to particular objects [...] Corpus texts facilitate the retrieval of recurrent patterns, but they do so at the expense of the context of situation in which the language under study was originally uttered. Semantic prosodies, therefore, have to be inferred by extracting information from the cotext which allows *a picture of the context of situation* to be built up. This is not dissimilar to the way that the semantic preference of a lexical item is identified, though in determining the semantic prosody, clues are as likely to lie in the colligational patterns as in the collocational ones, and *may not even emerge from repeated forms, but from repeated nuances instead* (Philip, 2009: 2-3, my emphasis).

In other words, semantic prosody is not to be equated with actual words or their combinations, which can be statistically examined by corpus linguistic methods. If such words or combinations re-occur, this is where semantic preference is handy as a useful step in the analysis. Semantic preference as a necessary step does seem to work in the particular example provided by the authors (pp. 44-46). This single example (very clearly explained) cannot be representative of all research situations, and it cannot be concluded from it that semantic preference is a crucial step in every case.

From Philip's discussion it follows that semantic prosody is an abstraction that is not to be equated with specific features of co-text such as semantic preference (this is not to deny the usefulness of observing semantic preference where it is possible). Examples of 'brook' and 'true feelings', put forward by Sinclair (e.g. Sinclair 2003), with clearly discernible and teachable semantic preference and semantic prosody, may have been chosen because of their pedagogical value. In contrast, in the BNC concordance of 'lays claim to' studied in Section 2 of this paper it appears that there is no discernible semantic preference, whereas there appears to be a semantic prosody of the claim's possible subjectivity.

Paradoxically, it is not Louw, but McIntyre and Walker (2019) who appear to 'run together' semantic prosody and semantic preference. This appears to be the case because they propose to add the MI score to the analysis (p. 41 and subsequent examples in Chapter 2). Collocational strength entails focusing on tangible collocates, not the 'picture of the context of situation' that may consist of 'repeated nuances' as opposed to 'repeated forms', as described by Philip (2009: 2). Additional focus on mutual information might unbalance this picture.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to dwell on the cumulative effect achieved by referring to Louw's work in McIntyre and Walker (2019). While their analysis of Louw (1993) has clear pedagogical value, too much focus on this now thirty-year-old publication, in an absolute absence of discussing Louw's work on corpus-derived subtext, cannot leave the reader with an adequate impression of Louw's impact on corpus stylistics. It must also be noted that flaws and inconsistencies observed by the authors in this particular paper have certainly been corrected/clarified in the subsequent publications by Louw and Milojkovic. Anyone who has perused them cannot imagine that Contextual Prosodic Theory might exist without opening contexts of concordance lines, or without analyzing specific semantic prosodies (not 'oversimplistically' positive or negative). That the very term 'Contextual Prosodic Theory' is not mentioned by the authors is also of significance, given the reference to Louw (2000) (McIntyre and Walker 2019: 46), in which the theory was first launched. Neither is our book *Corpus Stylistics as Contextual Prosodic Theory and Subtext* (Louw and Milojkovic, 2016) given a mention.

Arguably, the amount of criticism levelled at Louw in McIntyre and Walker (2019) may create an undeservedly unfavourable impression with the reader. In this paper I have attempted to

question the major part of this criticism. Perhaps the authors could have given Louw's work less space but more thorough treatment. In my view, occasionally Louw's statements in passing are considered in the book as if they were his major premises, and his major premises have been passed over.

I do not take issue with the very idea that Louw's Contextual Prosodic Theory should be classified as corpus-informed rather than corpus stylistics. But first of all, an academic consensus on this issue must be achieved. Quoting O'Halloran (2007) (p. 26) is insufficient. If Louw indeed discovered corpus stylistics (or co-discovered, simultaneously with Burrows), then classifying his work as corpus-informed is perhaps less than fair. Secondly, as things stand in McIntyre and Walker (2019), corpus-informed stylistics is defined as both qualitative analysis of texts against the background of large reference corpora, and work that a beginner who is integrating stylistics and corpora could be doing (p. 26). Louw's theoretical thinking is complex, and this lumping together of several notions (Louw, corpus-informed stylistics, beginners and qualitative analysis) strikes me as unfair.

I am well aware that the authors exhibit great sympathy for Louw in the body of the text, stating explicitly that "his work on semantic prosody has had significant influence within corpus linguistics generally" (p. 40). It is my impression that they engaged too seriously with previously published criticisms of Louw. Louw, for some reason, has never tried to counter published criticism of his work, which does not mean he could not do so.

As to Louw (1993), a groundbreaking paper of this sort is bound to leave some things unclear. The mind of an original thinker is original. Clarity of expression is more easily achieved when the premises are settled. I strongly recommend making the best of Louw (1993) without dwelling too strictly on what may not have been properly expressed, such as positivity/negativity of SP to the detriment of specific prosodies (e.g. of regret), or the idea that context can be determined without opening concordance lines. On the other hand, his more recent publications warrant thorough discussion. I therefore call upon the academic community to (re-)consider the work of Louw in order to give it its proper status.

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¹ In my PALA 2023 presentation, the second part of my concordance was mistakenly attributed to the BNC instead of COCA, and the search line was also mistakenly quoted. This second oversight influenced my discussion to a degree. I sincerely apologise to the audience, and am using this opportunity to correct my mistake. I am happy to say that the conclusion to the analysis has not suffered.

ⁱⁱ For the full list and discussion of Louw's publications, see Milojkovic (2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ I am grateful to Bill Louw for pointing this out to me.

^{iv} The discussion in this section is based on Milojkovic (2019: 53-55).