Personal and social factors in construal:
a cognitive grammatical approach to mind style

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Abstract

The distinction between a social 'ideological point of view' and a personal, psychological 'mind style' is one which raises questions for the stylistic analysis of literary texts (Semino, 2007; Stockwell, 2009). Though difficult to apply in practice, I argue that this distinction within worldview is significant to the variable readerly experience of fictional characters. This paper draws on Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008) as the methodological basis for a developed approach to 'mind style' (Fowler, 1977) and, in particular, its relationship with ideology.

In Langacker's model, alternative linguistic construals of a scene (2008: 43), compatible with the concept of mind styles, are relative to both a particular individual, and the socio-cultural factors which condition them through the entrenchment of conventional linguistic units. This framework is applied to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and its focalised representation of a dystopian fictional world. In this text, I argue, two alternative construals are presented side by side within language of the narrative; one best described as an ideological point of view and the other, an idiosyncratic mind style. Analysed using Cognitive Grammar, the narrator's struggle to maintain an individual mind style against the worldview imposed upon her within this ideological context, is found to be embedded within the grammar of the novel.

Key words: mind style, ideological point of view, Cognitive Grammar, construal, character, *The Handmaid's Tale.*

1. Introduction

This paper aims to demonstrate the benefits of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2008) for the analysis of 'mind style'. Since its introduction by Roger Fowler (1977, 1986) the term 'mind style' has been used within stylistics to refer to the *world-view* of an author, narrator or character, presented through patterns of linguistic choices within a literary text: 'cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world into one pattern or another, give rise to an impression of a world-view' (Fowler, 1977: 73). The development of a cognitive stylistic approach to mind style observed in more recent analyses, and notably the work of Semino (2002, 2007), has clear advantages in both theory and application. Drawing upon cognitive linguistic theories such as conceptual metaphor and schema theory, the 'distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self' described by Fowler (1977: 103) has gained an increasing level of specification in terms of 'the particular conceptual structures and cognitive habits that characterise an individual's worldview' (Semino, 2002: 95).

The application of Cognitive Grammar is, I believe, a natural step forward for mind style and one which poses a number of specific benefits for its analysis, as will be outlined in section 2. Of particular interest for this paper is its usefulness as a means of rethinking the relationship between mind style and the related notion of 'ideological point of view'. This distinction within worldview, I argue, may be significant to the representation of a narrator/character within a fictional world and their interpretative and affective experience by readers. In Section 3, an analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) will aim to illustrate its possible effects. Drawing upon Cognitive Grammar, I shall explore the way in which the relationship between mind style and ideology contributes to our experience of this text in significant ways.

2. Cognitive Grammar

Cognitive Grammar as set out by Ronald Langacker (1987, 1991, 2008) represents a specific model of language within cognitive linguistics. It argues that

'grammar is meaningful' (Langacker, 2008: 3) and attempts to map out, at an extremely detailed level, the organisation of linguistic structures in terms of underlying cognitive processes. Langacker claims that: 'Not only is [grammar] meaningful, it also reflects our basic experience of moving, perceiving and acting on the world. At the core of grammatical meanings are mental operations inherent in these elemental components of moment-to-moment living' (2008: 4-5). Cognitive Grammar (hereafter CG), then, seems ideally placed as a means of addressing the linguistic representation of fictional minds, and their interpretation by readers.

Following its literary adaptation as part of a Cognitive Poetics by Stockwell (2002) and Hamilton (2003), recent years have seen the application of CG to an ever increasing range of poetry, narrative and multimodal texts (Stockwell, 2009; Herman, 2009; Yuan, 2013; Harrison, 2013; Harrison et al., forthcoming). As I shall argue in this section, CG's ambitious model of linguistic structure has much to offer discussions of mind style.

2.1 Construal

In CG our 'ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways' is captured in the concept of 'construal' (Langacker, 2008: 43). This applies to all encounters with language within discourse, including that of a producer (e.g. a writer) who makes linguistic choices in coding his/her conceptualisation of a scene, and receiver (e.g. a reader) who reproduces this conceptualisation based, to some extent, upon these linguistic 'instructions' (Langacker, 2008: 460). This readerly conceptualisation draws upon the knowledge and experiences of an individual reader and may follow the 'instructions' provided by its textual construal to a variable degree, depending upon their personal dispositions. Through this two-sided nature, therefore, construal provides a framework for mind style as a linguistic interaction between minds: that of the reader, and that of the author, narrator or character to which it is attributed. This interaction is one of considerable significance within a cognitive stylistic approach to mind style. As Stockwell states, 'there is no doubt that the position of readerly (and

authorial) viewpoint *in relation to* character viewpoint is a crucial matter' (2009: 125 italics in original).

Perhaps the most significant benefit of construal for mind style is the set of detailed analytical concepts it provides for analysis of the 'cumulatively, consistent structural options' (Fowler, 1977) responsible for its effects. CG provides a systematic breakdown of the ways in which construals may vary in terms of various linguistic dimensions. The benefits of this detailed framework for stylistics have been observed in general terms by Herman (2009), who argues in favour of 'moving from talk of focalization to talk of conceptualization' within narratological discussions of point of view (2009: 99). Below, I shall briefly outline these dimensions, before focusing in more detail on certain aspects during my analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Generally speaking, a construal involves the relationship between a conceptualiser and a conceived situation. A good way to represent this general configuration is shown in Figure 1:
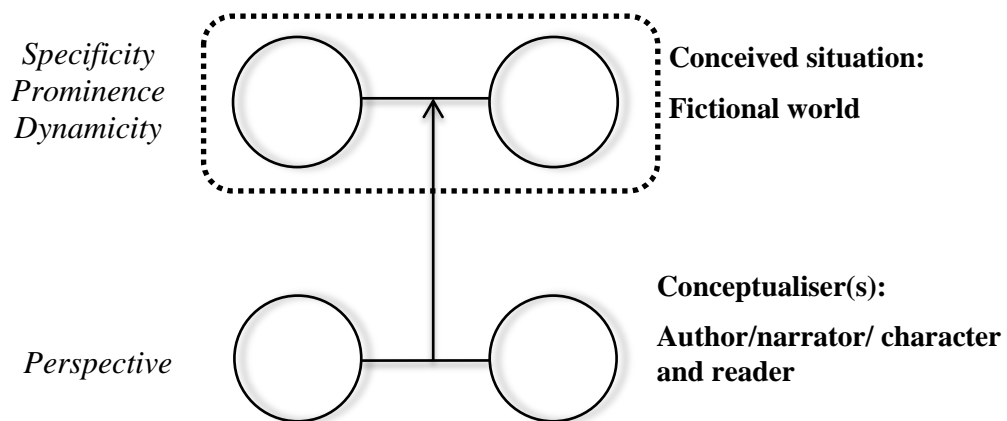

Figure 1. The 'construal configuration' (adapted from Verhagen, 2007: 62).

In Langacker's model, the way in which a situation is construed may differ in terms of multiple interrelated dimensions, categorisable as *specificity*, *prominence*, *dynamicity and perspective* (Langacker, 2007: 435). Following Verhagen (2007) these dimensions of construal can be identified with different aspects of this configuration.

Specificity, *prominence*, *dynamicity* involve the structuring of the conceived situation and its component parts, or the uppermost 'horizontal level' (Verhagen, 2007: 59). *Perspective* on the other hand, pertains to the structuring of the 'vertical' relationship between this content and its conceptualiser.

The first of these, *specificity* pertains to the level of detail or granularity with which this situation is conceptualised, drawing upon the range of linguistic constructions available within the language (Langacker, 2008: 55). *Prominence* refers to the directing of attention within this conceptualisation. In cognitive psychological terms, it is structuring in terms of the recognition of a figure against a ground. One kind of prominence is the *profiling* of an expression's content against its conceptual 'base' (2008: 66), or the focused knowledge domains activated for its interpretation. Next, construal is fundamentally dynamic in CG: 'It resides in mental processing (or neurological activity) and therefore occurs through time' (2008: 79). Langacker conceives of cognitive processing in terms of 'mental scanning', or a basic movement between stimuli involving a process of comparison (1987: 102). *Dynamicity* therefore describes the way in which this conceived situation unfolds through 'processing time' in terms of the direction and manner of mental scanning adopted in its access (2008: 110). Finally, *perspective* pertains to the 'viewing arrangement' between this conceptualised content and the conceptualiser(s) from whom it originates (2008: 73). A conceptualiser may occupy a range of 'vantage points' in relation to this situation, and may be more or less prominent within the resulting overall conceptualisation. As discussed earlier, in literary reading, the communicative space in which this conceptualiser is situated, the 'ground' (2008: 78), contains two conceptualisers engaged in a construal; the author, narrator or character to which the language is attributed, and the reader.

This multifaceted construal configuration can be interestingly compared with Bockting's (1994: 171-2) definition of mind style as: 'the linguistic expression of the conceptualisation of the world achieved by the individual, including the conceptualisation of the individual himself in this world'. Applying the concept of construal to a mind style involves the extension of the cognitive processes it describes to the conceptualisation built up across an entire text, or a substantial section thereof -

or the text world constructed in the mind of the reader. As the basis of my approach, I view mind style as a discourse-level construal of a fictional world, resulting from a 'cumulatively consistent' set of structural choices.

2.2. Mind style and ideological point of view

One of the terminological and theoretical issues which have arisen within recent discussions of mind style is its relationship with 'ideological point of view'. While Fowler viewed the two concepts as equivalent (1986: 150), they have since tended to have been regarded as separate notions. Semino has argued that:

> The notion of "ideological point of view" is most apt to capture those aspects of worldviews that are social, cultural or political in origin
> (…)
> The notion of "mind style", on the other hand, is most apt to capture those aspects of worldviews that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin.
>
> (Semino, 2002: 97)

Though providing a useful clarification of terms, the distinction between aspects of worldview which are social in origin and those dependent on personal experience is extremely difficult to make in practice (McIntyre, 2006: 143). Furthermore, as Weber (2004: 250-1) has highlighted, in making this distinction we risk losing some of the socio-political significance for mind style which underpinned Fowler's critical use of the term. This relationship thus poses a difficult question for mind style which has yet to be fully resolved (Semino, 2007: 169). One response, following suggestions by Fanlo Piniés (2005: 164) and Stockwell (2009: 124), is to regard the two as representing opposite ends of a single interpretative cline. This approach, represented in Figure 2 (adapted from Stockwell's (2009: 124) diagram), is one which I adopt. However, rather than viewing 'worldview' as the overarching concept, as in previous discussions, the two are viewed more specifically as types of *construal*. Modelled in these terms, the relationship between the two ends of this cline can be explored in more detail.

In CG an experiential construal becomes shared or conventional through repeated use of the linguistic constructions which code it within a particular speech community. Through repeated use, expressions, and the construals they represent become part of the 'inventory of conventional linguistic units' which make up a language and are judged to be 'well-formed' (2008: 222-3). The interpretative attribution of a worldview might thus be seen as a positioning along what Langacker would call a graded scale of 'conventionality' (2008: 227). Furthermore, this repeated use (represented in Figure 2 by the red arrow) involves processes of progressive psychological *entrenchment* and *abstraction* (2008: 220; 525), or a gradual loss of specificity in its construal.
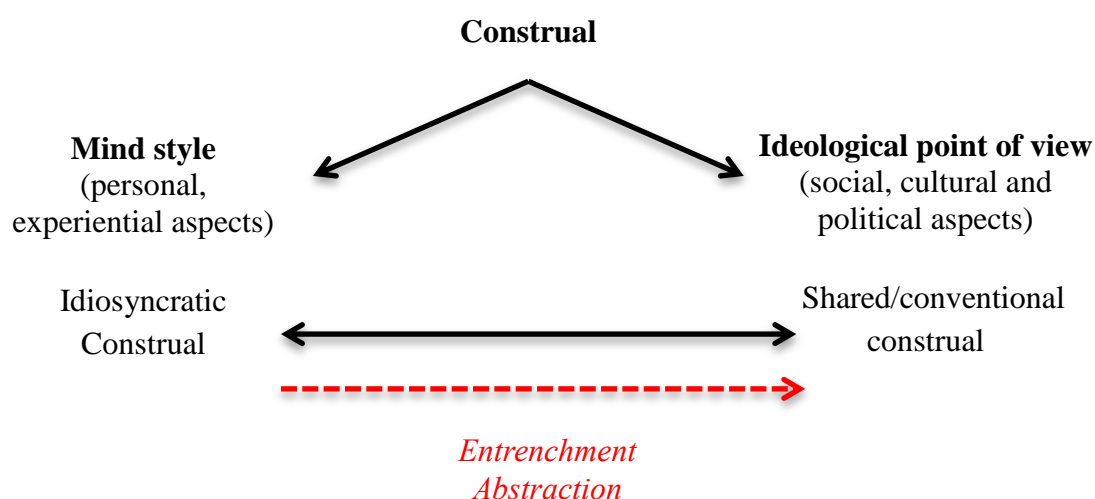
Construal

Mind style
(personal,
experiential aspects)

Ideological point of view
(social, cultural and
political aspects)

Idiosyncratic
Construal

Shared/conventional
construal

Entrenchment
Abstraction

Figure 2. A cline of construals (partially after Stockwell, 2009:124 and Semino 2002)

This model can be compared with the 'socio-cognitive approach' to discourse set out by Van Dijk (1995, 2008), in which personal 'mental models' are viewed as 'the experiential basis of generalization, abstraction and decontextualization processes that are involved in the formation of knowledge and attitudes as shared by group members' (1995: 252) (see also Semino, 2007: 169 and Fanlo Piniés, 2005 for this comparison). Indeed, the specific role of construal in the formation and perpetuation of ideology in this sense is currently being investigated by Christopher Hart (2011, in press) in his application of CG to Critical Discourse Analysis. For Hart, it is the nature of construal as 'a dynamic cognitive process that takes place 'online' at either end of the communicative event' (2011: 174) which makes it suited to description of the way in

which ideologically-constrained conceptualisations of the world are not only encoded by text-producers, but also promoted in the minds of readers/hearers during interpretation.

For the remainder of this paper, I shall aim to demonstrate the usefulness of this distinction between types of construal in terms of the readerly experience of a literary text. In criticism of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* the attribution of its narrative construal along such a cline appears to vary widely between readings. In this text, I shall argue, two alternative construals are presented side by side within the language of the narrative; one best described as an ideological point of view and the other, an idiosyncratic mind style. The way in which these manners of conceptualising reality interact within the text, and in the corresponding conceptualisation of a reader, contributes significantly to the novel's particular impact and the questions it asks of its readers.

3. *The Handmaid's Tale*

In Margaret Atwood's dystopian fiction novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996 [1985]) the reader is invited to conceptualise a speculative future society named 'Gilead' through the focalised perspective of its first-person narrator, 'Offred'. The narrative is set in a version of the United States in which the government has been overthrown by a totalitarian Christian theocracy. Offred, as a 'Handmaid', is a woman whose enforced duty is to be impregnated and bear children for the regime's male leaders. She is forbidden to communicate with other members of society beyond regimented set phrases, and trained for this role through the indoctrination of a set of culturally-specific religious and political ideologies.

A common theme in discussions of the novel is the distinctive voice of this narrator and its role within the power politics of the novel (Cooke, 1998). Within this fictional context, her first person narrative can be viewed as a significant act of resistance in itself, and one central to the novel's critique of gender relations. However, the extent to which this narrative voice, and the mind it reflects, can be interpreted as

resistant in this sense constitutes a recurring debate in discussions of the novel (Weiss, 2009: 120). For many critics, Offred's narrative reflects her last source of power; that over her own consciousness (Deer, 2001: 111) and the linguistic creativity and word play with which she expresses it (Beran, 1990; York, 1990). Indeed her narrative has been read as reflecting the heroic obstinacy of an individual mind style or the 'personal, aesthetic discourse with which she counters the authoritarian speech of Gilead' (Staels, 1995: 114-5). However, this interpretation contrasts with readings which view her narrative as that of a victim, irrevocably broken down by its oppressive ideologies (Bouson, 1993: 154; Dopp, 1994), and others which regard her more critically, as guilty of complicity in the continued atrocities of this regime (Stillman & Johnson, 1994; Dodson, 1997). These conflicting readings reflect the varied affective responses which characterise the novel's ongoing impact in its many adaptations for cinema, opera, radio and stage. A stylistic analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale,* drawing upon Cognitive Grammar, may uncover aspects of this narrator's mind style and its relation to this specific ideological context in greater detail and begin to account for some of the varied responses it evokes in readers.

3.1 A cognitive grammatical analysis

The extract below is taken from the opening of Atwood's novel. Following a brief flashback, it introduces the reader to this narrator's immediate surroundings through the first person, present tense narration which characterises much of the novel:

> A window, two white curtains. Under the window, a window seat with a little cushion. When the window is open – it only opens partly- the air can come in and make the curtains move. I can sit in the chair, or on the window seat, hands folded, and watch this. Sunlight comes in through the window too, and falls on the floor, which is made of wood, in narrow strips, highly polished. I can smell the polish. There's a rug on the floor, oval, of braided rags. This is the kind of touch they like: folk art, archaic, made by women, in their spare time, from things that have no further use. A return to traditional values. Waste not want not. I am not being wasted. Why do I want?

On the wall above the chair, a picture, framed but with no glass: a print of flowers, blue irises, watercolour. Flowers are still allowed. Does each of us have the same print, the same chair, the same white curtains, I wonder? Government issue?

Think of it as being in the army, said Aunt Lydia.

A bed. Single, mattress medium-hard, covered with a flocked white spread. Nothing takes place in the bed but sleep; or no sleep. I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thought must be rationed. There's a lot that doesn't bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last. I know why there is no glass, in front of the watercolour picture of blue irises, and why the window only opens partly and why the glass in it is shatterproof. It isn't running away they're afraid of. We wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge.

(Atwood, 1996: 17-18)

In this early section of the novel a number of distinctive patterns in this narrative construal begin to emerge. Of particular interest is the *dynamicity* of this construal. Langacker describes two types of scanning available to us in the construal of a scene (2008: 111). *Summary scanning* examines multiple entities cumulatively, building up a single group or 'gestalt' that can be apprehended holistically, "all at once". It is through this mechanism, that we profile 'things' during the processing of nominals, for example a 'chair' or 'stack of chairs'. *Sequential scanning* on the other hand is the operation which allows us to track a change or event through time, and takes place whenever we profile a 'process' such as the verb in 'I sat down on a chair'. This mechanism views individual 'states' (the relationship between me and the chair at any one moment) one by one, with each state fading from attention as the subsequent one is apprehended. Significantly, the same situation may be construed in either fashion (holistically or dynamically) depending on the type of scanning adopted in its access.

Illustrating this, though the scene Offred describes in the extract is largely static (it consists of various objects in unchanging relationships with one another), readers are invited to conceptualise it dynamically, through sequential scanning. This is achieved

through a pervasive use of commas which break up sentences into their individual component profiles and invite readers to conceive these components one by one, in what Langacker terms *attentional frames*. Attentional frames represent one way in which discourse is organised in CG, characterised as 'successive windows of attention, each subsuming a manageable amount of conceptual content' (2008: 481-2). Here, in my reading, Atwood's framing and its directing of attention, creates the impression of a shifting gaze, and a focalised perspective even before it is made explicit through 'I'. For Langacker, sequential scanning is fundamental to all moment-by-moment experience (2008: 111). The type of mental scanning privileged within a construal can be described simply then as the degree to which the inherent sequentiality or temporality of real-time experience is reflected during processing time or made prominent within the conceptualisation invited in a reader. In the extract, rather than profiling the relationship between objects as a holistic gestalt (as in, perhaps, *a little cushion on a seat beneath the window*) attention is focused upon this narrator's process of perception as it occurs through time.

Throughout the extract this linguistic construal forms a consistent pattern. In addition to objects themselves, the characteristics of objects are also construed in this dynamic manner in list-like sentences such as:

1) the floor, which is made of wood, in narrow strips, highly polished
2) a rug on the floor, oval, of braided rags
3) the kind of touch they like: folk art, archaic, made by women, in their spare time, from things that have no further use
4) a picture, framed but with no glass: a print of flowers, blue irises, watercolour
5) A bed. Single, mattress medium-hard, covered with a flocked white spread

This dynamic construal profiles not only the process of perception, but also the thought processes of this narrator. Readers' attention is often drawn away from this immediate world to knowledge and beliefs such as those which make up 'the kind of touch they like' or the scene as it appears 'When the window is partly open'. Frequently these conceptions are themselves processed in this fashion, as a series of individually

apprehended profiles: 'I can sit in the chair, or on the window seat, hands folded, and watch this', 'Does each of us have the same print, the same chair, the same white curtains, I wonder?' etc. As I have explored elsewhere, this dynamic construal can be applied to the shifts between beliefs, memories and direct speech throughout the text, and from which readers' overall conceptualisation of this fictional reality, or text world, is constructed (Nuttall, forthcoming).

This construal has a number of significant effects upon our conceptualisation of this scene. For Langacker, choices of attentional framing can be seen to impose a subtle semantic contrast: 'Dwelling on each clause individually, in a separate attentional gesture, enhances its cognitive salience, if only by according them more processing time and thus a fuller realization. On the other hand, incorporating both clauses in a single attentional gesture results in their phonological and conceptual "compression"' (2001: 157-8). The linguistic forms to which readers are invited to accord this extra processing time, however, are relatively unspecific (e.g. 'a window', 'a picture', 'the floor'). Individually they impose a rather 'schematic' (Langacker, 2008: 55) or abstracted construal of the commonplace features described, and are often repeated during the extract. Given this dimension of construal, the extended processing time accorded to their 'fuller realization' here through attentional framing might be said to contribute to a subtle distinctiveness which prompts the impression of a mind style.

The readerly experience of this construal can also be discussed in a cognitive grammatical account in terms of *mental simulation*. In CG, conceptualisation of the content of a linguistic expression always involves a simulation of experience (2008: 536-7). Taking place autonomously, in the absence of actual stimuli (e.g. the world of Gilead), simulations are always 'attenuated relative to engaged experience' (536). In other words they lack, to some extent, the 'intensity' or 'vividness' of embodied, physical reality. Sequential scanning is associated with our real-time experience of an event as it progresses through time and is thus said to produce a low level of 'attenuation' in our corresponding mental simulation (537). Through this construal therefore, this narrator-focaliser's processes of perception and conception are ones which readers are invited to vividly simulate in their conceptualisation of the scene.

Significantly, however, this dynamic construal, and the 'full realization' and vivid simulation it invites, is restricted to these immediate, subjective processes of perception/ conception. Langacker describes sequential scanning as 'the most natural way of apprehending', 'whether an event is observed, remembered or imagined' (2008: 111). In the extract, processes within conceived situations beyond the narrator's experiences in the here and now are frequently expressed using past participles: e.g. 'highly polished', 'framed', 'covered' , present participles such as 'running away' and the stative adjectival 'a cutting edge'. The participle form is said in CG to impose summary scanning upon these processes, profiling just one state within the evolving situations they describe (2008: 120-2). This 'atemporalization' is seen yet more explicitly in the nominalisation of processes in 'A return to traditional values', 'Government issue'. By holistically construing these conceived situations as abstract things, or gestalts, as opposed to complex processes - backgrounding their temporality, the reader is distanced from their attenuated content, and the wider fictional reality they represent.

Correspondingly, the individual cognitive salience of the entities apprehended within the narrator's immediate environment is also lacking from such conceptions of her wider context. Grammatical choices such as participles and nominalisations, adopted in this construal impose a restricted profile on the imagined or remembered situations described. In addition to being 'compressed' within a single attentional frame (Langacker, 2001), key participants, often the agent of a process, are backgrounded or absent from their profile, as in 'Flowers are still allowed' and 'It isn't running away they're afraid of'. Even in instances where participants such as 'they', 'you', 'we', are profiled, as in the latter, such participants are often unspecified and therefore ambiguous.

Overall, if we compare this construal with that of Offred's immediate experiences, the narrative can be said to invite a vivid simulation of this character's mental processes alongside a highly attenuated and far less cognitively salient conceptualisation of the wider fictional world itself.

3.2 The attribution of a mind style

What sets a mind style apart from the construal which underpins every instance of language use is its consistency and attribution to an 'individual mental self' (Fowler, 1977). Throughout this novel, readers are invited to attribute the distinctive conceptualisation of this fictional reality to that of its narrator. The conceptualisation of the individually salient components of this scene one by one, and the unfocused, unspecific and attenuated conceptualisation of its wider context invited through the language of the narrative, can be identified with the various restrictions imposed upon this narrator's perspective. Offred is physically and psychologically restricted within Gilead, permitted only within specific areas, along specific routes and denied knowledge of this society beyond her own personal circumstances. Readers also learn of a literal restriction upon her perception, through the white 'wings' which she, like all Handmaids, is required to wear around her face:

> Given our wings; our blinkers, it's hard to look up, hard to get the full view, of
> the sky, anything. But we can do it, a little at a time, a quick move of the head,
> up and down, to the side and back. We have learned to see the world in gasps.
>
> (Atwood, 1996: 40)

Through this construal, therefore, readers are invited to share the oppressive experience of this dystopian reality as part of their own conceptualisation of the text, in what might be felt as a close and affective engagement with this narrator.

However, readers' relationships with this character are far from simple. The attribution of this construal, and the distinctive experience it invites us to share, to an idiosyncratic set of cognitive habits or an ideological point of view - or rather its interpretative positioning along a cline in between the two - is made difficult by the text. Emphasised by occasional shifts into a 'we' narrative voice, as seen here, Offred's subjective acts of perception, conception and telling are constrained by the socially-imposed, ideologically-significant restrictions she shares with other Handmaids. In the opening extract Offred states: 'I try not to think too much. Like other things now,

thought must be rationed. There's a lot that doesn't bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last.' While 'thought must be rationed' seems like the kind of mantra taught by Aunt Lydia and consequently shared by all Handmaids, this character's choice to adopt this worldview is seemingly motivated by her own, personal, survival. Similarly, this narrator's intense focusing upon her rather mundane surroundings can be interpreted in a number of ways. Shortly after the extract, she reflects: 'But a chair, sunlight, flowers: these are not to be dismissed…Where I am is not a prison but a privilege, as Aunt Lydia said, who was in love with either/or' (Atwood, 1996: 18). The three possible attributions of this construal, to the personal resilience of this character, her oppression as victim, or a product of the indoctrinated complicity taught by Aunt Lydia, coexist simultaneously within the novel and create a tension during reading.

As the novel progresses however, readers are increasingly invited to attribute this construal not to the social restrictions upon Offred's perspective, but to her personal cognitive habits. During one of her prescribed morning walks, Offred apprehends the various red objects she encounters and states:

> The red is the same but there is no connection. The tulips are not tulips of blood, the red smiles are not flowers, neither thing makes a comment on the other…It is through a field of such valid objects that I must pick my way, every day and in every way. I put a lot of effort into making such distinctions. I need to make them. I need to be very clear, in my own mind.
>
> (Atwood, 1996: 43)

Here the construal of the bedroom scene observed in the first extract is seen to apply to this narrator's conceptualisation of her world as a whole as she maintains the full realization and dynamic processing of its individual components at the expense of a holistic conception. Later, in describing her lost pre-Gilead husband 'Luke', and her new lover 'Nick', Offred insists that: 'One and one and one and one doesn't equal four. Each one remains unique, there is no way of joining them together. They cannot be exchanged one for the other. They cannot replace each other. Nick for Luke or Luke for

Nick' (1996: 201-202). In light of such statements, this narrator's grammatical construal can be seen as reflective not only of her 'rationed' thought or sight in 'gasps' but also of a conscious, active maintenance of her 'own mind' and one of the 'litanies' she uses to 'compose [her]self' (1996: 120). Fittingly, Offred, wearing the prescribed Handmaid's uniform of red, 'the colour of blood, which defines us' (1996: 18), is metaphorically one of the equally 'valid' red objects which she persistently distinguishes between. It is by attributing the language of the narrative to Offred's individual mind style (*The* Handmaid of the title) as opposed to the socially-shared viewpoint of *a* Handmaid, that readers are prompted to distinguish an individual identity for this conceptualiser, whose real name prior to her designated label 'Of-Fred' is buried within the text for us to decode. In making this attribution as part of their own construal of the fictional world, readers, it might be argued, are thus *implicated* in this character's maintenance of her mind style and the struggle for identity which it represents.

3.3 Ideological point of view in Gilead

If we contextualise this narrative construal in a society in which women (and men) are viewed as exchangeable, replaceable commodities for reproduction, housekeeping etc., or one driven by an 'economic exchange value between commercially valid objects' (Staels, 1995: 163), Offred's mind style can be interpreted as a direct resistance of the ideology imposed by this social context. This Gileadean ideology and the specific point of view, or conventional construal which it promotes in its citizens is made explicit later in the novel when Offred describes the view enforced by its authorities; 'the Eyes':

> we must look good from a distance: picturesque, like Dutch milkmaids on a wallpaper frieze, like a shelf full of period-costume ceramic salt and pepper shakers, like a flotilla of swans or anything that repeats itself with at least minimum grace and without variation. Soothing to the eye, the eyes, the Eyes, for that's who this show is for.
>
> (Atwood, 1996: 224)

The holistic and schematic construal of the Handmaids here, summarily scanned as collective entities, static on a 'wallpaper frieze' or 'shelf', and 'without variation', contrasts directly with the construal which readers are invited to share with Offred through their reading of the text. By inviting readers to conceptualise the text world in this way, Atwood reveals the complex, traumatic, personal experiences that this ideological point of view, though more 'soothing' and 'picturesque', abstracts away from. Indeed through its grammatical construal, the whole narrative, I would suggest, is one which actively denies its readers this kind of 'soothing' experience, disrupting the kinds of holistic conceptualisation of individual scenes, and the cohesive, meaningful connections between ('red') imagery, that are often looked for in reading a literary text. To the extent that the denial of this conventional construal is actually *felt* during reading, the text might be said to engage readers in a simulation of the very resistance it thematically describes.

Finally, the struggle between these two construals within the text can also be seen dramatised in the instances of word play observed throughout the narrative. Adriano (1993) has compared the reading experience of Atwood's novel and its linguistic 'crosscurrents', with the game of Scrabble that Offred plays with Fred; the Commander to whom she is assigned: 'As Gilead constructs its horizontal text, June constructs a vertical one to cross it' (1993: 90). An often cited example of wordplay responsible for such an effect is Offred's witty rethinking of Aunt Lydia's statement: 'Think of yourselves as pearls, says Aunt Lydia…Pearls are congealed oyster spit' (1996: 124). In such wordplay, a recognisably conventional construal of women as 'pearls' is subsequently *reconstrued* in a more specific and revealing manner. Applying CG, other less commonly noted instances reveal the same pattern. From the opening of the novel, for example, the following two examples might be considered: 1) 'Waste not want not. I am not being wasted. Why do I want?' 2) 'For ladies in reduced circumstances. That is what we are now. The circumstances have been reduced' (1996: 17-18). In both cases, a recognisably conventional construal is seen in the form of an idiomatic construction. Both can be seen to involve an imposition of summary scanning upon the process described, through the use of infinitives (Langacker, 2008: 118) in the case of 'waste not want not' and the past participle in 'ladies in reduced circumstances'.

In both cases, Offred's subsequent observations draw out the internal contradictions of these construals, restore their specificity, dynamicity and a degree of prominence to the unprofiled agents; 'the Eyes', who remain ominously in the ground of this dystopian reality throughout the text.

4. Conclusion

Through the application of Cognitive Grammar, the struggle between an individual mind style and the abstracting forces of a specific ideological context is found to be embedded within the grammar of Atwood's novel. Key to *The Handmaid's Tale's* varied interpretations, I have argued, is the coexistence of two distinct construals of its fictional reality side by side. At times literally side by side in the grammatical reconstrual or wordplay which frequents the narrative, these alternative types of construal are also coexistent in terms of their possible attribution by readers. The distinctive manner of conceptualising reality presented through the language of Offred's narrative is often simultaneously attributable to both an individual mind style, and a socially shared ideological point of view. Though difficult to distinguish here, as in many texts, the relationship between these two aspects of worldview is significant to readers' experience of the novel, and their judgement of its main character.

The act of construal engaged in by readers of this text, and the somewhat ambiguous 'instructions' it provides for conceptualisation of its reality, requires readers to make their own judgements of its narrator. As the range of critical readings testify, it is possible to interpret the narrative simply as the shared ideological point of view of an indistinct Handmaid. In fact, in the 'Historical Notes' which follow the narrative, the interpretation of this 'tale' as bearing any closeness to the subjective viewpoint of the long-since deceased Offred is discouraged by the fictional 'Professor Pieixoto', who describes its unreliable source and adds his own ideologically-constrained construal of its narrator's situation from his vantage point in the year 2195 (Atwood, 1996: 311-324). By inviting readers to vividly simulate Offred's focalised perspective and furthermore construct an individual identity for her, before providing such disruptive

evidence to the contrary, the text invites its readers (even after its conclusion) to weigh these opposing construals in (re)forming their overall interpretation of the text.

Cognitive Grammar, as demonstrated by this analysis, provides a detailed framework for analysis of the linguistic patterns which contribute to the recognition of a mind style, along with the related notion of ideological point of view. Importantly, it allows this complex experience to be situated within a detailed, cognitively plausible account of readerly conceptualisation. As I have also suggested, such an approach invites a discussion of mind style, and the impression of character to which it contributes, as an interaction between minds and further still, one which might be said to implicate readers in the particular personal or ideological construal of the fictional world they choose to adopt. This cognitive experience of a mind style, and the range of ethical and emotional responses it may evoke, could be further explored using such an approach.

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