



### **CeSLiC Research Project**

#### ***Systemic Socio-Semantic Stylistics, the corpus, and the consumer***

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#### **The project**

The project's theoretical background is Ruqaiya Hasan's Systemic Socio-Semantic Stylistics (SSS; see, e.g., 1989 [1985]; 2007): a framework for the stylistic study of literature rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1985 and subsequent editions).

The essential premise of SSS is that literature is a 'special' text-type, thus requiring a 'special' theoretical and methodological take: a double-articulation model, whereby analysis at the level of the semiotic system of language (the starting point for investigating any type of text) is complemented by scrutiny at the level of the semiotic system of verbal art (Hasan 2007: 16). This second order of semiosis is where the deeper meanings of a literature text (its 'theme') are symbolically articulated (Hasan 1989 [1985]: 94-99) through foregrounding (Mukařovský 1964; 1977; 1978) – or, as Miller (2016) argues, through Jakobson's (1966) pervasive parallelism.

The project, carried out by Antonella Luporini and Donna R. Miller, aims at: (1) investigating the advantages and potential limits of using corpus linguistic techniques and methodologies within the SSS analysis of verbal art, and (2) exploring the pedagogic application of SSS as a tool for teaching English as a foreign language/ culture at the university level.

#### **Research Question 1:**

*To what extent can/ does the corpus assist the researcher in the SSS analysis of verbal art?*

Findings so far point to the role of the corpus as a magnifying glass, which is a necessary (especially in the case of longer and/ or particularly complex texts), but not sufficient analytical tool. In short, using corpus evidence to identify potentially meaningful patterns at the level of the semiotic system of language can be useful, even vital; however, manual analysis is also then essential to assess (a) whether those patterns are truly relevant, and (b) what their role is within the semiotic system of verbal art, i.e., in symbolically articulating the text's theme. From this viewpoint, an important step in the research process has dealt with a highly complex text: *Foe*, published in 1986 by South-African writer (and Nobel Prize for Literature) J.M. Coetzee. Other texts are also being investigated, both in poetry and in prose: e.g., J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*; J. Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*; D.H. Lawrence's *Lonely, Lonesome, Loney, O!*; John Whitworth's *Little*.



## Research Question 2:

*How can SSS be used to teach English as a foreign language/ culture at the university level?*

This question naturally stems from (1) above, and aims at building a solid, dynamic and bi-directional connection between our research and teaching activities. Focus here is on SSS as applicable pedagogical stylistics: the findings (and methods) resulting from point (1) are re-elaborated and used in class – within our undergraduate English Language and Linguistics courses – as a tool for linguistic and cultural teaching/ learning. We are currently organizing periodic interactive workshops with the students, steering them to replicate evidence from our studies and guiding their analyses and discussion thereof. Thus far, poetry has been the focus, as brief and self-contained. Among the texts brought into the classroom so far are D.H. Lawrence's *Lonely, Lonesome, Loney, O!* (1932) and John Whitworth's *Little* (2010). We are also implementing practices to monitor the participants' performance and to regularly collect their feedback.

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### Main publications related to the project

- Miller, D.R. and Luporini, A. (2015). "Social Semiotic Stylistics and the corpus: How do-able is an automated analysis of verbal art?". In A. Duguid, A. Marchi, C. Taylor and A. Partington (Eds), *Gentle Obsessions: Literature, Linguistics and Learning. In Honour of John Morley*. Rome: Artemide, 235-250.
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- Luporini, A. e Miller, D.R. (2018). "Systemic Socio-Semantic Stylistics: un metodo per insegnare la lingua e la cultura del/nel testo letterario". In B. Ivancic, P. Puccini, M.J. Rodrigo Mora e M. Turci (a cura di), *Il testo letterario nell'apprendimento linguistico: esperienze a confronto (Quaderni del CeSLiC, Atti di Convegni 5)*. Bologna: Centro di Studi Linguistico Culturali (CeSLiC), 61-74.
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### Conference presentations related to the project

- Miller, D.R. and Luporini, A. (2014). "Social Semiotic Stylistics and the corpus: How do-able is an automated analysis of verbal art?". *25<sup>th</sup> European Systemic Functional Linguistics Conference & Workshop*, Paris, 10-12 July 2014.
- Miller, D.R. and Luporini, A. (2015). "Systemic Socio-Semantic Stylistics and the corpus - Step 2: Appraising *tru\** in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*". *42<sup>nd</sup> International Systemic Functional Congress*, Aachen, 27-31 July 2015.
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