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Dan McIntyre

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LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN DAVID PEACE'S *1974*: A CORPUS INFORMED ANALYSIS

Dan McIntyre
University of Huddersfield, UK

Résumé : Cet article entend démontrer le potentiel interprétatif de l'analyse de corpus pour conforter ou corroborer une analyse stylistique qualitative. En s'intéressant à un passage du roman de David Peace, *1974*, on démontre que l'analyse de corpus permet de valider des assertions qualitatives et de proposer une méthode relativement objective permettant de sélectionner un passage pour une analyse qualitative.

Mots-clés : *1974*, AntConc, linguistique de corpus, David Peace, "keyness", *Wmatrix*.

Introduction

One of the inherent problems with analysing prose fiction is summed up by Leech and Short in their now famous *Style in Fiction*:

...the sheer bulk of prose writing is intimidating; [...] In prose, the problem of how to select – what sample passages, what features to study – is more acute, and the incompleteness of even the most detailed analysis more apparent.

(Leech and Short 2007, 2)

There are, in fact, two issues here. One is the simple fact that it is impossible to analyse a whole novel qualitatively in the level of detail required by stylistics. The second is that, because of this, it is necessary to select a short extract from the novel in question to subject to analysis. The consequent problem is how are we to choose which extract to study?

Since, as Leech and Short point out, ‘the distinguishing features of a prose style tend to become detectable over longer stretches of text’ (2007, 2), it is not surprising that in recent years there has been an increase in the use of corpus linguistic software that enables the analysis of large quantities of data (see, for example, Busse *et al.* 2010, Fischer-Starcke 2010, Mahlberg and McIntyre 2011 and Walker 2010). However, corpus linguistic methods alone do not offer a complete solution. While corpus linguistic techniques can provide valuable insights into the general properties of a text, for the approach to work to its best advantage, it needs to be used in conjunction with qualitative analysis. It is no use providing the quantitative analyses recognised as necessary by early stylisticians if we then fail to flesh these out with the detail that only qualitative analysis can provide. The ideal scenario, then, is to use corpus linguistic methods to assist in the selection of textual samples for qualitative analysis, and to then support that qualitative analysis with insights from corpus-based investigations. In methodological terms, this approach is analogous to Spitzer’s (1948) philological circle. This represents the analytical process generally followed by stylisticians wherein linguistic analysis enhances literary insights and, in turn, those literary insights stimulate further linguistic analysis. Methodologically, it should be possible to achieve something similar in terms of combining corpus- and non-corpus based methods of stylistic analysis; i.e. corpus linguistic analysis determines the choice of sample for qualitative analysis and qualitative analysis then determines the direction that further corpus analysis takes.

In this article, I aim to demonstrate the possibilities of this corpus informed approach through an analysis of David Peace’s novel *1974*. This is the first book in Peace’s *Red Riding Quartet*, which focuses on police corruption set against a fictionalised account of the Yorkshire Ripper murders that were carried out in Leeds, Bradford, Manchester and Huddersfield, in the UK, between 1975 and 1980. *1974* is narrated in the first-person by Eddie Dunford, Crime Correspondent for the local newspaper, *The Yorkshire Post*. The story takes place in West Yorkshire and begins with the discovery of the body of a girl who has been brutally murdered, as well as mutilated by having a pair of swan’s wings stitched to her back. As Eddie investigates the crime, he discovers potential connections between the young girl’s murder and a series of other child murders in the recent past. However, his investigation is hampered by the utter corruption of the police force.

The story is bleak, realistic and powerfully told. Peace is widely acknowledged to be a distinctive writer stylistically (see, for example, Shaw 2010, 2011) and my aim here is to show how a corpus informed analysis can account for the literary effects of the wealth of stylistic devices present in his writing.

Text selection

One advantage that corpus linguistics offers is the capacity to help the stylistician determine which part of a long text is likely to be of particular interest stylistically and therefore worthy of detailed qualitative analysis. The keywords function found in most corpus analysis software is particularly helpful in this respect. For the analysis reported in this article I used AntConc, a free concordancing program by Laurence Anthony (2011). Using AntConc it is possible to determine which of the words in your chosen text (which we can call our target corpus¹) are statistically over- or under-represented compared against their distribution in a larger reference corpus. The over- or under-represented words are keywords.

Keyness and keywords

To calculate keywords for *1974* I compared the novel against the FLOB (Freiberg-Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen) corpus. FLOB is a one million word corpus of written British English covering a wide variety of text-types. For the purposes of keyword analysis, the corpus linguist assumes that the reference corpus provides a measure of the normal distribution of words against which the frequency of words in the target corpus can be compared. AntConc calculates keyness using a statistical measure called log-likelihood², which assesses the difference between the frequency of words in the target and reference corpora, and how likely it is that any difference is genuinely significant rather than due to chance alone. This is perhaps easier to understand if we take a concrete example. If we look in the FLOB corpus we find that the word *power* occurs 405 times in 1,128,043 words. Assuming that the FLOB corpus has been constructed to be representative of written British English generally, we can say that this is its normal frequency. If we then looked in a corpus of 112,804 words (i.e. roughly ten times smaller), we would expect to see the word *power* turning up ten times less often: i.e. roughly 40 times. Of course, it would not be surprising if we found that *power* turned up 41 or 43 times. Some variation is to be expected. However, it would be very surprising indeed if we found that *power* turned up 1000 times in a corpus of 112,804 words. A result like this cannot be down to the chance selection of texts alone. 1000 occurrences is

¹ Strictly speaking, corpus linguists would not usually consider a single text to constitute a corpus since, as Sinclair (2005) points out, it does not allow for generalisations about language use as a whole. In practical terms, however, it is entirely possible to analyse a single text using the corpus linguistic techniques employed in the analysis of large corpora.

² A chi-square test is also available; see van Peer *et al.* (2012) for a discussion of appropriate statistical tests for Humanities research.

significantly more than the normal frequency we would expect and suggests that the texts in the corpus are skewed in terms of their content (i.e. not balanced or representative of the language generally). In such a case, *power* would be a statistically significant keyword.

Keywords are interesting to examine because they beg the question ‘why is this word key?’ This is a question of function, which, unsurprisingly, is of particular interest to stylisticians. A starting point for a corpus informed stylistic analysis, then, might be to determine the key words in the target text and investigate why it is that they are so over- or under-represented. For instance, it may be that keywords reveal some overall thematic concern (see, for example, Mahlberg and McIntyre 2011) or that they act as style markers (see Culpeper 2009).

A keyword analysis of *1974* reveals that the following are the 20 most over-represented words statistically:

1. I
2. the
3. my
4. you
5. what
6. fucking
7. he
8. said
9. it
10. no
11. she
12. Barry
13. me
14. a
15. yeah
16. you
17. Jack
18. door
19. and
20. up

Some of these results are to be expected and are therefore not particularly interesting interpretatively. For instance, the novel is a first-person narration so it is no surprise to find the pronoun *I* used more than we would expect it to be normally. The same is true of *my*. Again unsurprisingly, the keyword *what* appears in interrogative sentences and its overuse is perhaps explained by the genre of the novel. This is to some extent a thriller and questioning of characters by other characters may be connected to plot exposition. Interestingly, the first lexical word on the list is *fucking*. I therefore decided to

investigate this keyword further and use it to determine a small section of the novel to subject to qualitative analysis.

Keywords and concordance plots

Having identified a keyword to hone in on, the next issue is to determine (i) which section of the whole text contains instances of that keyword, and (ii) which of the sections where the keyword is found are candidates for qualitative analysis. The concordance plot function in AntConc can be used to help narrow down this search. Concordance plots (sometimes called dispersal plots) indicate the position of a chosen search word in the corpus file. For example, the concordance plot for *fucking* in a file comprising the whole novel shows that the keyword is spread fairly evenly across the whole text (single black lines indicate the presence of the keyword; thicker lines indicate conglomerations of keywords):

Fig. 1 Concordance plot of *fucking* in whole text

Fig. 1 clearly shows the keyword is not concentrated in a particular part of the novel but is instead fairly evenly dispersed. This in itself is an interesting result but is not particularly helpful for determining an area to focus on for qualitative analysis. To this end, it is useful to separate the novel into chapter files. Concordance plots for each chapter can then be calculated. The plots for the first two chapters are shown in fig. 2:

Fig. 2 Concordance plot of *fucking* in chapters 1 and 2

Examining concordance plots for single chapters is similar to zooming in on a particular area of a street map. The result is a clearer picture of what a particular area looks like. Fig. 2 shows that *fucking* is present in both chapters 1 and 2 and that there is a particular clustering of keywords towards the end of the second chapter (indicated by the

thicker black lines). The question of why the keyword should cluster at this point in the chapter is an interesting starting point for a stylistic analysis. For this reason, I decided to focus on the end of chapter 2 for qualitative analysis. Clicking on the thick black line in AntConc takes you to the second paragraph in the extract below. To contextualise this, I have included the preceding and subsequent paragraphs in the selection (instances of the keyword are marked in bold and sentences are numbered for ease of reference):

If it bleeds, it leads. (1)
‘How’d it go with Hadden?’ Kathryn was standing over my desk. (2)
‘How do you **fucking** think,’ I spat, rubbing my eyes, looking for someone easy. (3)
Kathryn fought back tears. (4) ‘Barry says to tell you he’ll pick you up at ten tomorrow.
At your mother’s.’ (5)
‘Tomorrow’s bloody Sunday.’ (6)
‘Well why don’t you go and ask Barry. I’m not your bloody secretary. I’m a **fucking**
journalist too.’ (7)
I stood up and left the office, afraid someone would come in. (8)

In the front room, my father’s Beethoven as loud as I dared. (9)
My mother in the back room, the TV louder still: ballroom dancing and show jumping.
(10)
Fucking horses. (11)
Next door’s barking through the Fifth. (12)
Fucking dogs. (13)
I poured the rest of the Scotch into the glass and remembered the time when I’d actually
wanted to be a **fucking** policeman, but was too scared shitless to even try. (14)
Fucking pigs. (15)
I drank half the glass and remembered all the novels I wanted to write, but was too scared
shitless to even try. (16)
Fucking bookworm. (17)
I flicked a cat hair off my trousers, trousers my father had made, trousers that would
outlast us all. I picked off another hair. (18)
Fucking cats. (19)
I swallowed the last of the Scotch from my glass, unlaced my shoes and stood up. (20) I
took off my trousers and then my shirt. (21) I screwed the clothes up into a ball and threw
them across the room at **fucking** Ludwig. (22)
I sat back down in my white underpants and vest and closed my eyes, too scared shitless
to face Jack **fucking** Whitehead. (23)
Too scared shitless to fight for my own story. (24)
Too scared shitless to even try. (25)
Fucking chicken. (26)
I didn’t hear my mother come in. (27)
‘There’s someone on the phone for you love,’ she said, drawing the front room curtains.
(28)

'Edward Dunford speaking,' I said into the hall phone, doing up my trousers and looking at my father's watch:

11.35 p.m. (29)
A man: 'Saturday night all right for fighting?' (30)
'Who's this?' (31)
Silence. (32)
'Who is it?' (33)
A stifled laugh and then, 'You don't need to know.' (34)
'What do you want?' (35)
'You interested in the Romany Way?' (36)
'What?' (37)
'White vans and gyppos?' (38)
'Where?' (39)
'Hunslet Beeston exit of the M1.' (40)
'When?' (41)
'You're late.' (42)
The line went dead. (43)
(Peace 1999: 43-44)

The above example demonstrates that the combination of keyword analysis and concordance plots can be a useful means of determining a short section of a text to subject to qualitative analysis. The next stage is to move on to this more detailed analytical level.

A qualitative analysis of an extract from *1974*

A traditional method of doing stylistic analysis is to follow Spitzer's (1948) technique of beginning with an intuitive response to the text in question and then validating (or invalidating) this impression through linguistic analysis. My intuitive response to *1974* is to note an overwhelmingly negative atmosphere described by a narrator who appears to be volatile and almost irrationally angry. As a character he gives the impression of being instinctive rather than contemplative, with a tendency towards plain speaking, the latter quality perhaps being indicative of a fairly basic level of education. Underlying my analysis of *1974* there is an additional research question to be answered: namely, what is the function of the keyword *fucking* in this extract?

Keywords in context

First of all, we can observe that the nine instances of *fucking* from the concordance plot occur in the second paragraph and are part of the first-person narration of Eddie Dunford. The other two examples in the selection above occur in direct speech in the preceding paragraph. Furthermore, seven of the

examples from the second paragraph occur in instances of free direct thought presentation (see Leech and Short 2007, Chapter 10) in which Eddie apparently addresses himself. These instances constitute a stylistically interesting scheme. Each instance of *fucking* is followed by reference to an animal:

- Fucking horses. (11)
- Fucking dogs. (13)
- Fucking pigs. (15)
- Fucking bookworm. (17)
- Fucking cats. (19)
- Fucking chicken. (25)

The first two examples of this (*horses* and *dogs*) express Eddie's annoyance at, respectively, the show jumping programme which he can hear on the television in the next room and the barking of the dog in the adjoining house. There is something comic in the fact that Eddie's annoyance is directed at the animals generally rather than the noise which is the actual locus of his irritation. Following this, the next reference is to 'fucking pigs', which deviates from the previous two structures in that the animal reference is metaphorical, *pigs* being a slang term for *police*. The lexical and syntactic parallelism of the three examples, with the semantic deviation in the third example, generates the effect of Eddie viewing the police as being on the same level as animals which cause him annoyance. The next phrase in the series, 'fucking bookworm', is an instance of Eddie turning his ire against himself by referring scornfully to his literary ambitions. This metaphorical use of an animal term has the further effect of characterising Eddie as small and insignificant, especially when contrasted against the 'pigs' of the police force. There is a return to a literal animal term in the next phrase, and the switch from introspective self-loathing to general irritation at cats seems blackly comic. The final phrase in the sequence again constitutes self-assessment, with *chicken* being a common euphemism for *coward*. The general function of this sequence is to convey the emotions of irritation, self-loathing and anger than Eddie feels, thereby aiding the characterisation process. The repeated use of *fucking*, appended equally to referents which generate both mild irritation (e.g. *cats*) and extreme loathing (e.g. *pigs*) characterises Eddie as extremely tense, angered as he is by both serious and minor issues. This anxiety is reinforced by the parallelism of the sentences that intersperse the free direct thought presentation (14, 16, 18, 20). Dynamic verbs indicate a series of small-scale actions ('I poured...', 'I drank...', 'I flicked...', 'I swallowed...') which suggest restlessness and nervous tension.

Speech and thought presentation and sentence structure

The nature of stylistic analysis is that one analytical insight leads to another. In the case of *1974*, the fact that the keyword *fucking* occurs primarily in short bursts of free direct thought presentation leads naturally to a consideration of the general functions and effects of discourse presentation in the extract. What is clear is that all speech presentation is either direct speech or free direct speech (see Leech and Short 2007, 256-58, and Chapter 10 generally for the model of discourse presentation employed here). That is, speech is presented using the most maximal presentation options available; there is no narrator interference. Thought, on the other hand, is presented in a variety of forms: free direct thought (e.g. 'Fucking cats'), Narrator's Report of a Thought Act (e.g. 'remembered all the novels I wanted to write') and Narrator's Report of an Internal State (e.g. 'Too scared shitless to even try'; see Short 2007 for more on this category). The distinction between speech presentation and introspective thought is emphasised by the lack of narrator interference in the former. There is consequently a distinct change in atmosphere between the first and second paragraphs of the extract, as Eddie moves from an external presentation of speech with no narrator interference to a highly introspective presentation of thought.

What is also interesting in relation to speech and thought presentation in the extract is the presentation of narration (the Narrator's Report of Action, as Short 1996 terms it in relation to discourse presentation). While the narration in paragraph one is conveyed in full sentences, paragraph two has some marked differences. Sentences nine, ten and twelve are all minor sentences, lacking a main verb. In this respect, they have more in common with dramatic stage directions than conventional past tense prose narration. This sparse narration has a tendency to occur when Eddie is alone (see McIntyre 2011 for further comment on this issue) and appears to belie a lack of concern on the part of the narrator for descriptive minutiae. The effect that this generates is the suggestion that Eddie has little regard for anything beyond his immediate concerns; the narration is the bare minimum needed to establish the sense of time, place and action that Eddie needs in order to relate what he considers to be the important elements of the story. Further evidence of this can be seen in the minimal use of reporting clauses for direct speech and the preponderance of free direct forms. This also creates something of a cinematic effect, in the sense that the emphasis here is on mimesis rather than diegesis.

Sentence length

Related to sentence structure is the issue of sentence length, which Leech and Short (2007) deal with analytically by comparing their analyses of this stylistic feature to the norms determined by Ellegård (1978) in his analysis of the sentence structures of texts in the Brown corpus. The so-called Ellegård norm for sentence length, determined through corpus analysis, is 17.8 words. The graph in fig. 3 compares the length of sentences in the 1974 extract against this norm:

Lexical features

Related to the simple sentence structure that dominates the extract is a tendency towards direct and concrete expression in terms of lexical choice. Of the 64 nouns (excluding proper nouns), just eight are abstract. The dominance of concrete nouns is appropriate for a direct and plain-speaking narrator. Similarly, of the 30 adjectives there are just eleven types, the majority of which relate to fear (*shitless*, *scared*, *afraid*) and anger (*fucking*). The remainder are

strongly negative in connotation (e.g. *stifled*, *dead*, *bloody*). The lack of adjectival variation is also indicative of a limited vocabulary on the part of the narrator, which again works as a characterisation device. The past tense verbs in the passage are predominantly intransitive (13 of 21), perhaps emblematic of a lack of purposefulness on the part of Eddie. Adverbs are primarily emphatic (*still*, *actually*, *even*, *too*), which, in combination with the other lexical and grammatical features discussed, further contributes to the characterisation of Eddie as volatile and highly strung.

Supporting qualitative analysis with corpus-based analysis

The analysis in section three begins to explain the source of some of my impressionistic responses to the *1974* extract. The impression of volatility on the part of the narrator, Eddie Dunford, arises in some measure from his tendency to express the same level of anger towards minor and major issues. His plain-speaking nature is conveyed via his limited vocabulary, by the predominance of concrete rather than abstract nouns, and by the lack of concern for descriptive detail in narrative sentences. Maximal speech presentation forms and a lack of reporting clauses also contribute to this straightforward and sparse narrative style. Having established all of this through qualitative analysis, we might now return to the corpus analytical method to seek further support for some of the claims being made.

Key semantic domains

One possibility, offered by the Wmatrix software package (Rayson 2009), is to calculate not just keywords but key semantic domains. Wmatrix does this by automatically applying semantic tags to every word in the target corpus using USAS (UCREL Semantic Annotation System). The USAS tagset is based on the *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* (McArthur 1981) and is essentially an inbuilt thesaurus, allowing the sorting of constituent words into semantic categories. Once this process has been completed, it is possible to compare the distribution of semantic domains in the target corpus to that of the semantic domains in a reference corpus, in order to determine those that are over- or under-represented in relation to the norm. The log-likelihood statistical test that Wmatrix applies in order to work this out has numerous cut-off points depending on the degree of confidence we wish to express in terms of the how likely it is that the observed result is a significant one. Given that the extract from *1974* is short, it is sensible to choose the highest cut-off point of 15.13, a figure which indicates 99.99 per cent certainty ($p < 0.0001$) that the result we are seeing is not down to chance alone. Using the BNC Written Imaginative

sampler as a reference corpus and applying this cut-off point to the list of key semantic domains generated, we find that the highest ranked key semantic category to be over-represented in the *1974* text is FEAR/SHOCK. The keyness of this domain perhaps emphasises the degree to which the narrator, Eddie, is under stress, as well as potentially explaining his volatile behaviour. Also key are the domains HINDERING and EXCEED; WASTE. The former domain comprises the words *fought*, *fight*, *fighting* and *stifled* and the category of HINDERING may well be a source of the perceived negative atmosphere. That EXCEED; WASTE is also a key category is a further trigger for this response. Key semantic domains, then, can be useful in determining the source of thematic concerns in the text.

N-grams

Another analytical option afforded by corpus linguistic software is to view n-grams, or repeated word sequences of a defined length (*n* stands for any number, hence a 4-gram would be a sequence of four words that occurs more than once). In *1974* as a whole, the complete list of 5-grams which appear more than ten times is as follows (the number of instances of each 5-gram is given in square brackets):

1. [21] at my father s watch
2. [19] North of England Crime Correspondent
3. [13] Detective Chief Superintendent George Oldman
4. [13] I looked at my father
5. [13] looked at my father s
6. [12] Dunford North of England Crime
7. [11] Edward Dunford North of England
8. [10] did as I was told

These repeated sequences are interesting stylistically because of the light they shed on the narrator's character. This information can then be brought to bear on the qualitative analysis presented above. For example, the most repeated 5-gram is *at my father's watch* (the genitive 's is treated as a separate word by Wmatrix). The fact that Eddie repeatedly makes a point of referring to the watch as his father's rather than his own (Eddie's father is dead) is potentially indicative of his sense of loss and, perhaps, ongoing grief. This may be a contributory factor to Eddie's fragile mental state in the novel (evidence of which can be seen in the extract discussed above). Numbers four and five in the list above are sequences related to the first 5-gram. 5-grams numbers two and three are also indicative of Eddie's character. Eddie has a propensity for referring to the police officer leading the murder investigation by his full title,

i.e. *Detective Chief Superintendent George Oldman*. What is clear from the contexts in which he does this is that this use of Oldman's full title is not done to convey respect. Rather, the use is disparaging, aimed at demonstrating the arrogance of Oldman and his fellow officers as they hide behind the protective hierarchy of the force. Interestingly, though, Eddie's reference to himself as the newspaper's *North of England Crime Correspondent* is similarly disparaging, suggesting both his awareness of the parochial nature of his position and a degree of self-loathing at being part of a hierarchy of his own. Throughout the novel, Eddie displays a tendency to despise himself for his own failures, and the self-mockery he exhibits in his use of his job title to refer to himself conveys this. The 5-gram is useful for showing up this aspect of his character across the whole novel, and the information gleaned from this can be applied to the extract discussed above in order to shed further light on what motivates Eddie's behaviour in this passage.

Conclusion

Inevitably, my analysis of the extract from *1974* is, like any other stylistic analysis, incomplete. It may be superseded by any analysis which offers a greater level of detail and interpretative insight, or it may be invalidated if evidence from the novel as a whole counters my claims regarding the specific extract that I have analysed qualitatively. Nonetheless, I hope to have shown that a qualitative analysis that is informed by evidence derived from corpus analysis is more robust than one which ignores quantitative evidence completely. Corpus methods can be used in the selection of texts for qualitative analysis, as well as to support and test the claims made in such analyses. Ideally, corpus methods should inform qualitative stylistic analysis which, in turn, should determine the focus of further corpus-based research. Achieving this methodological blend is likely to lead to more reliable and more replicable analyses, as well as greater insights into the source of literary stylistic effects.

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