

Chapter 9

Cognitive Grammar and reconstrual: Re-experiencing Margaret Atwood's 'The Freeze-Dried Groom'

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9.1 Introduction

Cognitive stylistics is primarily concerned with the cognitive processes that underpin reading and their experience by readers. Most cognitive stylisticians agree that experiences of reading texts are dynamic and flexible. Changes regarding the context of reading, our temperament on a given day, our extra background knowledge about the text, and so on, are all factors that contribute to our experience of a fictional world. In this paper, we further argue that this experience should be analysed diachronically. Introspectively, a second reading of a text is a qualitatively different experience to a first reading. The context for reading will always be different on subsequent encounters with a text; we will be older and more knowledgeable to a greater or lesser extent; we may be more or less attentive; and may bring with us a different set of feelings, attitudes and interests. Given the myriad of factors involved, the experiential differences which characterise subsequent engagements with a fictional world are a difficult object of study. However, since cognitive stylistics is concerned with natural reading experiences, and re-reading is part of this experience, this issue is worth addressing.

Of the dynamic contextual factors involved in re-reading, one that would seem to be relatively constant is the increased knowledge of the outcome of a story, afforded by a first reading. In

stylistics and empirical studies of literature there has been some examination of the experience of (re)reading a surprising text, or one with a reveal. Previous studies have considered the role of prior knowledge and inferencing in our processing of plot twists (Emmott 2003; Tobin 2009); the effects of narrative event sequencing for feelings of suspense, curiosity and surprise (Prieto-Pablos 1998; Hoeken and van Vliet 2000); and the way in which particular textual cues may be ‘buried’ on a first reading in order to facilitate such experiences in readers (Emmott and Alexander 2014). Additionally, a number of reader response studies have examined how re-reading influences the aesthetic appreciation and experiences of literariness, particularly with regards to those textual cues which are ‘foregrounded’ in attention (Dixon et al. 1993; Hakemulder 2004).

Here, we outline an account of reader processing offered by Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008) and illustrate its use as a framework for discussing readers’ evolving experiences of fictional worlds. This application is demonstrated through stylistic analysis of a short story, ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’ from Margaret Atwood’s (2014a) collection *Stone Mattress*. Applying concepts from Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar, we make predictions about readers’ experiences of this story on a first- and second-reading, looking in particular at the changing conceptualisation of its characters and the shifting prominence of aspects of the fictional world. While providing a useful set of concepts for analysing the conceptualisations cued by specific textual choices in terms of *construal*, this framework also allows us to describe the *reconstrual* that takes place during a subsequent reading of this text.

9.2 Cognitive Grammar as stylistic tool

Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008) is one of a number of frameworks in cognitive linguistics that aims to model the cognitive processes underpinning language use and structure. Recent studies in cognitive stylistics have identified the usefulness of Cognitive Grammar as a stylistic tool (see Harrison et al. 2014; Hamilton 2003; Harrison 2017; Harrison forthcoming; Nuttall 2015; Nuttall forthcoming; Stockwell 2009). These applications depart from the original use of the model by Langacker, which tended to focus on analysis of everyday language use at the clause or sentence level. By adapting this framework to the analysis of literary discourse, work in cognitive stylistics has demonstrated how Cognitive Grammar can help to explore the experiential and embodied aspects of reading, situating the experience of reading within wider processes of cognition.

One of the most readily applicable aspects of Cognitive Grammar for stylistics is *construal*, which describes our “ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways” (Langacker 2008: 43). Langacker’s model outlines the main cognitive mechanisms through which we construe situations using language. The following three sections outline these mechanisms and their usefulness as a basis for discussing readers’ conceptualisations of fictional worlds.

9.2.1 Focusing and specificity

A fundamental way in which construals differ is in the nature and extent of the knowledge *focused* during language processing. Cognitive Grammar describes lexical choices as providing access to a network of encyclopaedic knowledge in the form of *domains* (Langacker 2008: 44). Roughly equivalent to concepts such as ‘frames’ (Fillmore 1985), ‘scripts’ (Schank and Abelson 1977) and ‘schemata’ (Bartlett 1932), domains are knowledge structures relating to

any area of experience: linguistic or non-linguistic; perceptual, physical or cultural; and are said to form the basis, or background, for our understanding of language. Importantly, different linguistic choices provide access to a different set of domains (Langacker 2008: 62). For example, despite their synonymy, describing someone as a *cook* or *chef* may focus different domains such as HOME and RESTAURANT respectively. With regards to literary reading, the kind of knowledge structures focused by a linguistic construal has consequences for the way that readers flesh out their conceptualisation of a fictional world and the inferences they are able to make.

Construals also differ in the degree of detail or *specificity* at which the situation is conceived (Langacker 2008: 55). Alternative linguistic choices for describing the same situation can be arranged in taxonomic hierarchies reflecting a scale from highly schematic to highly specific, for example, *living thing > person > adult > chef > the tall, over-heated chef named Sarah*. The chosen level of specificity in the description of a fictional world determines the extent to which its conceptualisation is constructed from the ‘bottom-up’ and, on the other hand, the extent to which readers must fill in the gaps ‘top-down’, using their schematic knowledge (cf. Semino 1997).

9.2.2 *Prominence and reference point chains*

Another dimension of construal concerns the attention given to individual entities within the conceived situation. *Prominence* relates to the relationship between foreground and background in perception, or the tendency for certain elements to ‘stand out’ against the rest of the (visual) field; a phenomenon described in Gestalt Psychology as the relationship between *figure* and *ground* (Ungerer and Schmidt 2006: 163-206). In Cognitive Grammar, this

relationship is manifested in linguistic structure through *profiling*, where ‘profiles’ refer to the entities focused in attention by linguistic forms against the background of our schematic knowledge (Langacker 2008: 67). Linguistic forms profile ‘things’ (e.g. *the sandwich*), ‘atemporal relationships’ (e.g. *the sandwich in the kitchen*) or ‘processes’ (e.g. *bring me a sandwich, Peter*) and these profiles combine in discourse to form a layered foreground and background for a conceived situation. Which entities stand out most in attention within our conceptualisation is said to be determined by factors comparable to those which influence the perception of figures in our everyday environment, such as ‘newness’, ‘agency’, ‘definiteness’ and ‘empathetic recognisability’ (Langacker 1991: 296; see also Stockwell 2009: 25). By differing with respect to such factors, alternative linguistic construals vary in terms of the relative prominence they allocate to the features of a fictional world.

Our conceptualisation of language – and the fictional worlds it portrays – is dynamic; it occurs through time as we read a text, or listen to someone speaking. Our shifting attention to the profiles presented by a series of linguistic choices is described as a process of ‘mental scanning’ along *reference point chains* (Langacker 2008: 85). Viewed in these terms, the profile of a linguistic expression is a *reference point* and the network of domains that it affords access to, its *dominion*. This dominion contains a range of mentally accessible entities within our schematic knowledge, or potential *targets*, which may be focused later in the discourse by subsequent linguistic choices, or alternatively allowed to fade from attention.

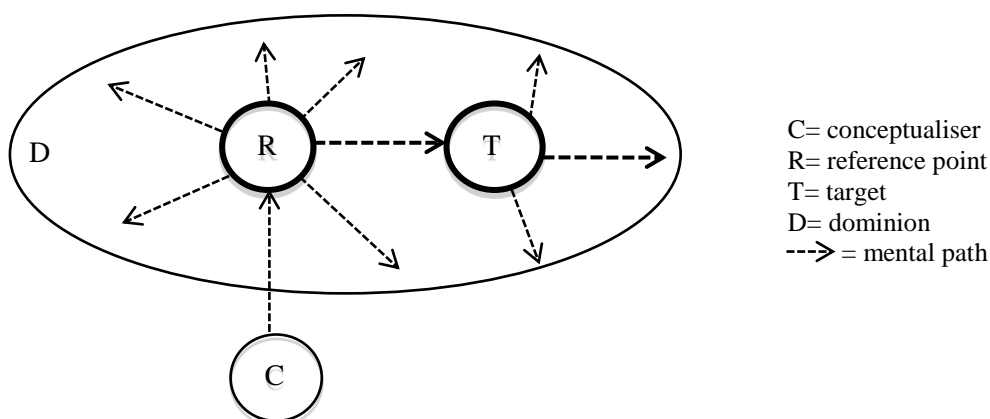


Figure 1. A reference point relationship (adapted from Langacker 2008: 84)

Applied to literary reading, this model describes the dynamic process by which readers incrementally develop their conceptualisation of a fictional world in response to the particular sequence of linguistic cues provided by a text (see also Stockwell 2009, 2014). The prominence of these reference points, as well as the content and specificity of the knowledge domains they cue, can have a range of consequences for readers' experiences of fictional worlds.

9.2.3 Subjective and objective construal

Finally, construals vary in the amount of attention focused upon the *conceptualiser(s)* and the vantage point from which they 'view' the situation (Langacker 2008: 77). Construals differ in the extent to which they are *objective* or *subjective*:

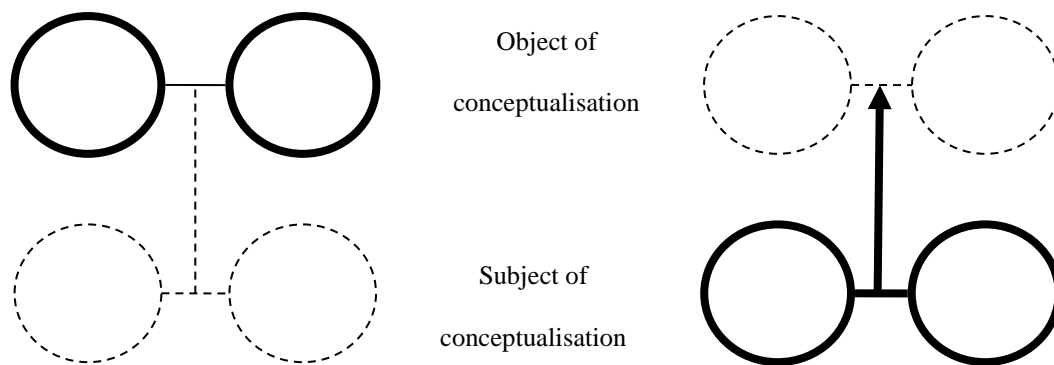


Figure 2. Maximally objective (left) vs. maximally subjective (right) construal; after Verhagen (2007: 61-2) and also summarised in Harrison et al. (2014: 10).

The objective construal represented on the left can be compared with the experience of a particularly absorbing play at the theatre, in which the attention of the conceptualisers (the audience) is entirely focused on the characters and their situation. When awareness of our viewing self is at a minimum in this way, a construal can be described as maximally objective. Alternatively, when made aware of our role as conceptualisers – or, equally, the role of an author or fictional character as narrator or focaliser – the construal is subjective, as in that represented on the right. Linguistic construals of fictional worlds vary in their degree of objectivity/subjectivity by drawing attention to the object or subject of conceptualisation to differing extents, and at different points during reading. The kinds of linguistic choices responsible for this dimension of construal include the use of pronouns and tense to indicate a particular point of view and more subtle choices of speech and thought presentation. The various construals possible and their effects are well attested in discussions of point of view and focalisation in stylistics and narratology (see Herman 2009 for a summary).

Considered together as part of a unified model of construal, these dimensions offer a framework for discussing the different ways in which readers conceptualise fictional worlds. This approach

is compatible with the analysis enabled using Text World Theory (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007) and, through its focus on linguistic structures, enriches the discussion of text-worlds at a micro-stylistic level (Nuttall 2014). In addition, this framework allows us to talk about this conceptualisation as a dynamic process during reading, and one that occurs at both the production and reception ends of communicative events (Hart 2011). In every text, a distinction can be made between a *writer construal* – the specific textual choices chosen by a writer; the way they have construed and presented the fictional world, and a *reader construal* – the way individuals respond to these textual cues and draw on their own schematic knowledge in order to conceptualise the fictional world (Harrison 2017). In practice, the two construals are difficult to distinguish; as emphasised in Text World Theory, the construction of a text-world is best seen as an online ‘negotiation’ between discourse participants (Gavins 2007: 20). However, this distinction remains a useful one for stylistics, particularly when discussing multiple readings of the same text. First and second readings of a text represent the same writer construal, but different reader construals. Viewed in this way, the different experiences that the same text can generate on first and second readings may be best accounted for in terms of the dimensions of construal, and may in turn provide insight into these mechanisms themselves. In section 9.3, we introduce a text for which first and second readings seem to carry significant differences. The analysis in section 9.4 addresses how construal of the fictional world presented varies between readings of the text.

9.3 Margaret Atwood’s ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’

In ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’, we encounter a misogynistic and morally dubious protagonist, Sam, who is preoccupied with imagining his own post-mortem. The narrative is framed through

third-person narration and describes a day in Sam's life. It begins with his car breaking down (Extract 1) and with his wife Gwyneth announcing that she wants a divorce over breakfast. The narrative then follows Sam as he goes to work (a counterfeit antiques business; though it is implied that this functions as a cover for drug dealing), before he attends a storage unit auction in order to purchase merchandise for his antiques shop. In the third storage unit, he discovers that someone has stored all of their wedding paraphernalia, complete with a mummified bride groom (Extract 2). Throughout the story, there are a number of hypothetical text-worlds (Gavins 2007) in which Sam imagines what would happen following his demise: he pictures, for example, his post-mortem, and plays out scenarios where the police are questioning his wife and colleague about their final conversation (Extract 3). The story ends with Sam alone in a hotel room with the 'bride', who admits to having murdered her former fiancé and placed him in storage. Sam speculates about his fate as we are assured that 'Nobody knows where he is' (p. 165).

The story is one of nine 'wicked tales' in *Stone Mattress*: the collection details stories that are not "from the realm of mundane works and days", but instead reside in "the world of the folk tale, the wonder tale, and the long-ago teller of tales" (Atwood 2014a). Critics have commented on Atwood's adaptation of tropes from Horror and the Gothic in *Stone Mattress*, and the 'vivid' scenes and caricatures which 'run to a general pattern' in the wider collection (Le Guin 2014). The simultaneously 'macabre' and 'humorous' reading experience invited by its world and characters (Gill 2014) and their shared focus on topics of 'aging and mortality' (Beattie 2014) are well exemplified in 'The Freeze-dried Groom'. Further, the seemingly unfinished nature of this particular story means that it seems to deliberately invite a second reading. Indeed, following the publication of the collection, Margaret Atwood set up a fan fiction competition,

via the fan fiction website Wattpad, where she invited readers to continue the story.

Contributors were asked to consider the following questions:

1. What does Sam really do for a living?
2. What is Gwyneth's perspective on Sam and his shady lifestyle?
3. Could the woman Sam meets be a serial killer?
4. What happens after the last scene of the story?
5. Why did Gwyneth tell Sam to leave?

(Atwood 2014b)

Such questions invite readers to re-conceptualise, or re-construe, various aspects of the fictional world. Some Wattpad contributors responded to Questions 2 and 5 by re-construing the narrative through Gwyneth's perspective, and others similarly (possibly in response to Question 3) reconceptualised the narrative through the 'bride's' perspective.

In order to answer these questions, a closer look at, or physical re-reading of the textual cues in the original text is invited. Whether aware of this competition or not, this story is one which seems to invite a re-reading as part of its experience. Furthermore, these readings are ones that are likely to differ significantly, given the acquired knowledge of the eponymous 'Freeze-Dried Groom' revealed in the latter half of the story. A cognitive stylistic analysis of the experience of this story, we argue, would need to distinguish between, and account for, these readings. The following analysis presents an attempt to do so using concepts from Cognitive Grammar.

9.4 Analysis

For the purposes of this analysis, we will focus on just three short extracts from the story. The following two extracts are the opening of the story (Extract 1) and the reveal scene, in which Sam opens the storage unit he has just purchased for the first time (Extract 2).

Extract 1:

The next thing is that his car won't start. It's the fault of the freak cold snap, caused by the polar vortex – a term that's already spawned a bunch of online jokes by stand-up comics about their wives' vaginas.

Sam can relate to that. Before she finally cut him off, Gwyneth was in the habit of changing the bottom sheet to signal that at long last she was about to dole him out some thin-lipped, watery, begrudging sex on a pristine surface. Then she'd change the sheet again right afterwards to reinforce the message that he, Sam, was a germ-ridden, stain-creating, flea-bitten waste of her washing machine. She'd given up faking it – no more cardboard moaning – so the act would take place in eerie silence, enclosed in a pink, sickly sweet aura of fabric softener. It seeped into his pores, that smell. Under the circumstances he's amazed that he was able to function at all, much less with alacrity. But he never ceases to surprise himself. Who knows what he'll get up to next? Not him.

*

This is how the day begins.

(Atwood 2014a: 135-6)

Extract 2:

Right at the front there's a white wedding dress with a skirt like an enormous bell and big puffed sleeves. It's swathed in a clear plastic zip bag, as if it just came from the store. It doesn't even look worn. There's a pair of new-looking white satin shoes tucked into the bottom of the bag. There are white elbow-length buttoned gloves pinned to the sleeves. They look creepy: they underscore the absence of a head; though there's a white veil, he sees now, wrapped around the shoulders of the dress like a stole, with a chaplet of white artificial flowers and seed pearls attached to it.

[...]

"Crap," says Sam out loud. His breath unfurls in a white plume because of the cold; maybe it's the cold that accounts for the lack of smell. Now that he notices, there is in fact a faint odour, a little sweet – though that could be the cake – and a little like dirty socks, with an undertone of dog food that's been around too long.

Sam wraps his scarf across his nose. He's feeling slightly nauseous. This is crazy. Whoever parked the groom in here must be a dangerous loony, some kind of sick fetishist. He should leave right now. He should call the cops. No, he shouldn't. He wouldn't want them looking into his final unit, number 56 – the one he hasn't opened yet.

The groom's wearing the full uniform: the black formal suit, the white shirt, the cravat, a withered carnation in the buttonhole. Is there a top hat? Not that Sam can see, but he guesses it must be somewhere – in the luggage, he bets – because whoever did this went for the complete set.

Except the bride: there isn't any bride.

The man's face looks desiccated, as if the guy has dried out like a mummy. He's enclosed in several layers of clear plastic; garment bags, maybe, like the one containing the dress. Yes, there are the zippers: packing tape has been applied carefully along the seams. Inside the clear layers the groom has a wavery look, as if he's underwater. The eyes are shut, for which Sam is grateful. How was that done? Aren't corpse eyes always open? Krazy Glue? Scotch tape? He has the odd sense that this man is familiar, like someone he knows, but that can't possibly be true.

(Atwood 2014a: 152-5)

9.4.1 Atmosphere and tone

A striking feature of this story's experience is the distinctive quality of its fictional world. Reviewers of the novel on Goodreads (2014-2016) describe this story as 'sublimely creepy' (Julie 2014), 'morbid and disturbing' (Althea Ann 2014), and the story collection as a whole as 'dark' (Veronica 2014; Annet 2016). Stockwell (2014) has distinguished between two related aspects of the felt 'ambience' of fictional worlds: 'atmosphere' and 'tone', where the former concerns a perceived quality of the world described, and the latter, the perceived quality of a narrating voice (2014: 361). This section builds on this previous account by modelling the way in which this experience changes between readings of the same text.

On reading this story for the first time, a prominent feature of its fictional world is the references to COLD which recur in its opening (see Extract 1) and throughout. Situated fifth in the collection, references to 'the freak cold snap' and 'the polar vortex' in the opening paragraph of this story can be linked to the ice storm which traps the main character in her home in the first story 'Alphinland' and which reappears as the setting for the following two interconnected stories. (These references also continue in the stories which follow 'The Freeze-Dried Groom', most notably in the Arctic setting for the title story 'Stone Mattress'). Such cues can be seen to act as reference points in an *inter-textual reference point chain* which readers

may attend to across and between the stories. Adapting the Cognitive Grammar model (see section 9.2.2) these *reference points* can be seen to activate a range of *targets* within a developing *dominion* of reader knowledge, which may include knowledge of cold climates, personal and cultural (e.g. metaphorical) associations, and inter-textual knowledge of other fictional situations and characters in this collection. These targets will vary in terms of ‘centrality’ (Langacker 2008: 57), or strength of association. Targets such as the vengeful and sometimes murderous female characters found within this cold setting in this collection, for example, may be weakly activated by these reference points for some readers. It is by scanning between such loosely connected reference points across the collection, or drawing connections between specific textual cues – the weather, the women and the murders carried out or imagined, that a sense of the ‘dark’ world in which these stories take place is progressively enriched.

Other references to MARRIAGE and DIVORCE in this story (e.g. ‘groom’, ‘wives’, ‘marriage is over’ in Extract 1) invite readers to focus relevant schematic knowledge and so draw inferences about the characters and their relationship. In doing so, readers fill in gaps in the relatively unspecific construal of ‘Sam’ and ‘Gwyneth’, and later, the antiques business that Sam runs, according to the ‘principle of minimal departure’ (Ryan 1991: 51). However, not all such knowledge will contribute directly (or equally) to the text-world. Some of the targets cued by reference points appear less immediately relevant than others, and remain in the dominion, or ‘periphery of consciousness’ (Croft and Cruse 2004: 50) during reading. The foregrounded title of this story, prominent as a result of its semantic deviation, may trigger other less central targets, for example relating to FOOD STORAGE and that which it negates, DECAY, which are not realised through further reference points in the opening of the story and so fade from attention (see Stockwell [2009: 182] on attentional ‘neglect’). Though not feeding directly into

our conceptualisation of the fictional world, such unrealised targets, or ‘secondary schemata’ (Semino 1997: 172), can be said to contribute to a cumulative sense of ‘atmosphere’ during reading (Stockwell 2014).

In our conceptualisations of this fictional world, attention is drawn very strongly to the focalising character in a highly *subjective construal* (see section 9.2.3). The combination of third-person pronouns with deictic expressions such as ‘The next thing’, ‘relate to that’, ‘that smell’, ‘This is how the day begins’, give the impression that we are accessing Sam’s consciousness directly, through free indirect discourse (see Leech and Short 2007), while rich uses of modality and evaluative language (e.g. ‘finally’, ‘thin-lipped, watery, begrudging sex’, ‘He’s amazed’) further increase the prominence of this conceptualiser and his negative, misogynistic attitudes. The effect of this construal for the authors of this chapter was strong dislike and distancing from this focaliser, which continues throughout the story. In the Cognitive Grammar account of perspective, subjective construal has the effect of drawing attention away from the object of conceptualisation – in this case, the fictional situation Sam focalises. By inviting readers to focus their attention on this character, the cumulative experiential effects of the reference points we are invited to process: the death and decay that persist in the background, are more likely to be attributed to the ‘tone’ of this character (Stockwell 2014), as opposed to the nature of the world in which he is situated.

A prominent scene in this story occurs just over halfway through the narrative when Sam discovers the dead groom of the title. This scene, the start of which is seen in Extract 2, can be seen to exemplify a ‘twist in the tale’ as discussed by Emmott (2003). This scene takes readers by surprise through a departure from the default assumptions that they have been invited to make drawing on their schematic knowledge – in particular, about the kinds of things that are

typically stored in storage units. However, unlike the ‘plot reversals’ that Emmott identifies in the texts she analyses, the reveal in this story does not act as a denouement, prompting us to repair a previously ‘erroneous’ conceptualisation (see also Gavins [2000] on ‘world-repair’). Rather, this scene defamiliarises the mundane situations conceptualised so far and challenges readers to ‘refamiliarise’ this fictional world, or “discern, delimit, or develop the novel meanings suggested by the foregrounded passage” (Miall and Kuiken 1994: 394). This refamiliarisation involves a reconstrual of the textual cues processed on a first reading.

A re-reading of this text sees a shift in the *focusing* prompted by textual cues and the *specificity* of the situation conceptualised (section 9.2.1). Acquired knowledge of the freeze-dried groom scene enriches the dominion of targets cued by references to cold. Its potential significance as a metaphor for the characters’ failed relationship and Sam’s potentially sinister (and arguably well-deserved) fate are now activated by the title and other references throughout, for example ‘dead as November’ (p. 141), ‘Freeze your nuts off’ (p. 141), ‘locked into the virtual refrigerator’ (p. 144), ‘silent witness to his frozen-fingered manoeuvres’ (p. 145) and ‘Bitch out there’ (p. 146). These textual cues now contribute to a closely knit *intra-textual reference chain*, which, by repeatedly focusing specific knowledge of the scene later to come, create foreshadowing and a sense of inevitability that did not exist (for the authors) on a first reading.

In addition, this reconstrual involves a shift in *prominence* for features of the fictional world (section 9.2.2). Words and phrases that were given little or no attention on a first reading – or which were ‘buried’ (Emmott and Alexander 2014) – now gain in prominence as reference points in new chains. References such as those seen in Table 1 might now be seen to be cohesively linked by their common activation of related domains such as STORAGE, CLEANLINESS and SMELL. As well as feeding into our conceptualisation of the marriage

described, such cues bring to mind and progressively enrich a conceptualisation of the freeze-dried groom scene we know is yet to come. At another point in this story, Sam imagines ‘himself lying on a mortuary slab while a forensic analyst – invariably a hot blonde, though wearing a lab coat over her firm, no-nonsense lady-doctor breasts – probes his corpse with delicate but practised fingers’ (p. 139). Knowledge of this scene, and others encountered during a first reading, may also be activated in the dominion of such reference points (e.g. ‘bottom sheet’, ‘pristine surface’).

	STORAGE	CLEANLINESS/DECAY	SMELL
Extract 1	‘freeze-dried’; ‘bottom sheet’; ‘sheet’; ‘cardboard moaning’; ‘eerie silence’; ‘enclosed’	‘freeze-dried’; ‘watery’; ‘germ-ridden’; ‘stain-creating’; ‘flea-bitten’; ‘washing machine’; ‘fabric softener’; ‘pristine surface’	‘a pink sickly sweet aura of fabric softener’
Extract 2	‘swathed in a clear plastic zip bag’; ‘luggage’; ‘enclosed in several layers of clear plastic’; ‘packing tape’; ‘scotch tape’	‘new looking’; ‘dirty socks’; ‘dessicated’; ‘wavery look, as if underwater’	‘a faint odour’; ‘a little sweet, a little like dirty socks with an undertone of dog food that’s been around too long’

Table 1: Intra-textual reference point chains across Extracts 1 and 3

The felt consequence of this reconstrual, we would suggest, is an overall increase in attention devoted to the fictional world. The increased density of the reference point chains which readers are invited to attend to, and the richness of the dominion they activate, might be predicted to involve greater allocation of cognitive resources as readers attempt to refamiliarise this fictional world. This macro-level effect can be described as an increasingly objective construal of the fictional world, or one in which attention is focused less on the focaliser: his attitudes and tone, and more on making sense of the situation he describes.

9.4.2 Cohesion and coherence

In his discussion of how reference point chains impact on literary texture, Stockwell (2009) argues that cohesion and coherence are interrelated phenomena; an idea that goes against the differentiation of the categories as outlined in systemic-functional models (see, e.g., Halliday and Hasan 1976; Hasan 1985). Instead, Stockwell (2009: 181) argues that there are ‘coherent associations’ in language that provide a more ‘psychologically plausible’ account of how readers make connections between parts of a text during the reading process. Coherent associations are patterns and conceptual relationships within a text that are not simply dependent on textual links and formal inter-sentential connections, but are additionally connections that are generated through semantic and experiential associations triggered within a text.

The previous section of analysis (9.4.1) suggested that the coherent associations experienced by readers of ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’ are likely to vary between readings of the story, with the intra-textual reference point chains between scenes acknowledged by readers particularly on a second reading of the text. Another significant experience of reading this short story, and

which fragments the narrative coherence across multiple readings, is the movement between the main story and Sam's hypothetical musings on what happens after his death. Early in the story Sam informs readers that in order to 'keep himself under control he slides back into the mind-game he often plays with himself: suppose he was a murder victim' (p. 139). These hypothetical or imagined 'world-switches' (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007) occur throughout the story, and often feature dialogue from an imagined police interview of other characters, as in Extract 3 below.

Extract 3:

"Drive safe" says Ned. He texted me to send the van. That was at 2:36, I know 'cause I looked at the clock, the art deco one right over there, see? Keeps perfect time. Then, I dunno, he just vanished.

Did he have any enemies?

I just work here.

Though he did say...yeah, told me there'd been a fight with his wife. That would be Gwyneth. Don't know her that well myself. At breakfast, walked out on her. You could see it coming. Cramped his style, never gave him enough space. Yeah jealous, possessive, he told me that. She thought the sun shone out his ass, couldn't get enough of him. Would she, did she ever...Violent? Naw, he never said that. Except for the time she threw a wine bottle at him, empty one. But sometimes they just snap, women like that. Lose it. Go nuts.

He entertains himself with the discovery of his own body. Naked or clothed? Inside or out? Knife or gun? Alone?

(Atwood 2014a: 149-150)

In this extract, Sam has just said goodbye to his colleague, Ned, before travelling on to the storage unit. After a direct speech construction in which Ned instructs Sam to "Drive safe", there is an immediate shift to Sam's speculation on the events following his hypothetical death. The switch in construal to Sam's 'mind-game' is graphologically signposted through the use of italics: "'Drive safe' says Ned. *He texted me to send the van.*" The direct speech continues, and still belongs to Ned, although the other formal speech presentation markers (inverted commas, reporting clauses) are dropped. It is clear that, through a number of stylistic signposts, a police interrogation is being imagined. Ned replies with highly specific details ("*That was at*

2.36, *I know 'cause I looked at the clock, the art deco one right over there, see?*”), and increasingly specific strings of information (“*Cramped his style, never gave him enough space [...] She thought the sun shone out his ass, couldn't get enough of him*”) that readers can connect to wider knowledge on police interview scripts. It seems significant that only one half of this interrogation is presented, however – with the exception of the foregrounded interrogative “*Did he have any enemies?*”. The remaining police questions are suggested through Ned’s topic shifts, discourse markers, and phrasal mirroring (“*Yeah jealous, possessive, he told me that [...] Would she, did she ever... Violent? Naw, he never said that*”).

The emphasis on Ned’s direct speech within this world-switch means that Ned is featured as the main *figure* in the scene. As a named, speaking character he has ‘definiteness’ and ‘empathetic recognisability’ and is therefore prominent (see section 9.2.2) while the unspecified police interrogator is backgrounded in attention. The return to Sam’s focalisation at the end of the extract is marked through the removal of italics, and the list of rhetorical questions where he considers alternative specific details (“Naked or clothed? Inside or out? Knife or gun? Alone?”). This list outlines some of the details required for a ‘whodunit’; although the ambiguity of their presentation supports the view that ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’ is “almost a spoof of the detective novel” (Maciek, Goodreads 2014). Through the sudden world-switches triggered in this way, and the off-stage characters they profile, Atwood’s story can be seen to complicate readers’ conceptualisation of the fictional world and obscure their understanding of the situation presented. Who is speaking at this point? Is this account of events real or imagined?

Primed by the questions raised during a first reading, a second reading of this story invites increased attention to the layered perspectives involved in its construal. As argued in section

9.4.1, a first reading of the story reveals an unlikeable, misogynistic character, presented via a highly subjective construal. What occurs on a second reading, however, is that another *conceptualiser* – the unidentified third-person narrator of the story – gains in prominence. While the refamiliarisation process afforded by a re-reading of the text places emphasises on the object of conceptualisation – the fictional world being described – at certain points in the narrative (e.g. through the reference point connections outlined in Table 1), we would argue that a re-reading of ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’ simultaneously subjectifies the narrative perspective, by increasing attention to the third-person narrator. This shifting distribution of attention between the object and subject of conceptualisation can be represented as in Figure 3 below. In this figure, the thickest lines represent the prominent focus of attention, and the dotted lines represent the least prominent aspect of this construal.

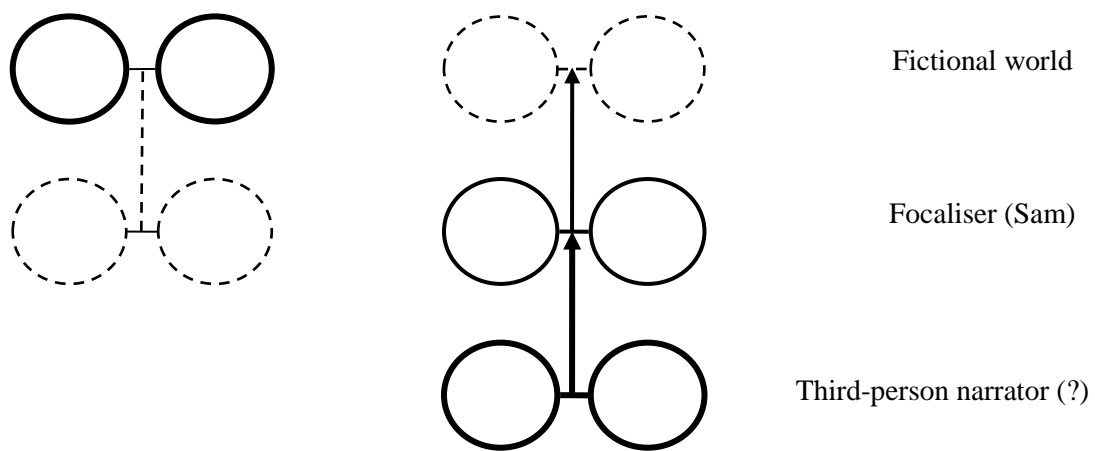


Figure 3. Second reading and impact on construal: refamiliarising the fictional world (left); identifying an external conceptualiser (right)

The presence of this narrator-conceptualiser in certain parts of the story is signposted through particular formulaic phrases that follow the schematic template of a police account and that appear outside of the context of the world-switches of Sam’s ‘mind-game’. In fact, these appear

throughout the narrative, to the extent that the whole story may be reframed as a police report. Extract 1, for example, opens with the framing sentence: “The next thing is that his car won’t start”. The temporal marker (‘next’) establishes a list of events from the outset. Two paragraphs later, this report framing structure is reinforced through the sentence: “This is how the day begins”. These are phrases that, we would argue, are acknowledged on the “periphery of consciousness” (Croft and Cruse 2004: 50) on a first reading, but which are reconceptualised as more significant on a second reading. Considered alongside the unspecified, off-stage interrogator in Extract 3, coherent associations begin to emerge. We question, for example, whether this report-style account suggests that this second conceptualiser is, in fact, a detective outlining Sam’s movements.

The added layer of conceptualisation (see Figure 3) means that readers view the text through another subjective lens on a reconstruction of this fictional world. Our awareness of this subjective filter is reinforced by the unflattering presentation of Sam’s thoughts and actions that mark him out as an unlikeable character, and further complicates the tone created at particular points in the story. Readers can infer sarcasm, for example, in the use of particular emphases (“His partner is already there, in the back, engaged in the usual occupation, which is furniture forgery. No: *furniture enhancement*”, p.146); rhetorical derision (“Who knows what he’ll get up to next? Not him”, p. 135) and thinly-veiled mockery (“Don’t be a dickhead, Sam, he tells himself. You’re losing your cool”, p. 140). Someone who is not predisposed to like Sam would seem to be narrating this story. Such textual cues for recognition of this critical narrative perspective, we would argue, are more likely to be recognised during a second reading of this story. It has been suggested that readers often conceptualise simultaneous perspectives in reading (Emmott 1997) – particularly in response to free indirect discourse, where readers may need to ‘backtrack’ to discern point of view (Bray 2007: 46). Attention to the different implied

conceptualisers in ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’ as described above may nevertheless require additional cognitive effort compared to attention to Sam’s focalising perspective alone. One hypothesis is that this attentional processing is more likely to be possible during a second reading, when fewer cognitive resources need to be devoted to basic propositional content (Millis 1995; Millis, Simon and TenBroek 1998).

The presence of another conceptualiser also complicates how we process Sam’s ‘mind-game’ world-switches. As discussed earlier in this section, on first reading, sections such as Extract 3 are likely to be interpreted as Sam’s own hypothetical imaginings in the present (as a ‘modal-world’ as opposed to a ‘deictic world-switch’ ([Gavins 2007])). On re-reading, however, there is an increased likelihood of readers attributing sections of direct speech and thought to that of another character in a future world-switch after Sam’s disappearance. This reconceptualisation of accounts lends validity to the perspective of this new conceptualiser; we are following a story recounted by a narrator who is clearly more omniscient than Sam. In Cognitive Grammar terms, this means that these scenes change from representing a ‘projected reality’ to becoming part of the ‘actual reality’ (Langacker 2008; see also Langacker 1999) of the text-world. In other words, the level of ‘fictive simulation’ (Langacker 2008; Dabrowska and Divjak 2015) alters so that these world-switches become a continuation of the narrative rather than auxiliary, unrealised events. Fittingly, at the end of *Stone Mattress*, readers are invited to reflect on such varying levels of fictivity: in the Afterword to the collection, Atwood argues that “[w]e may safely assume that all tales are fiction, whereas a ‘story’ might well be a true story about that we usually agree to call ‘real life’” (2014a: 309).

It seems the clues, or the ‘exposition’ (Sternberg 1978), to Sam’s suggested demise, were there all along. Arguably, ‘The Freeze-Dried Groom’ fulfils some of the criteria for a ‘garden-path’

narrative (Sternberg 1978; Emmott 2003; Tobin 2009). This foreshadowing of events emphasises the inevitability of Sam's demise, supporting the view that the collection as a whole brings "to the fore the utter helplessness with which many are resigned to end their lives" (Gill 2014).

9.5 The importance of re-reading

This chapter has demonstrated how Cognitive Grammar can be used as a cognitive stylistic tool to describe the distinctive conceptualisations cued by particular linguistic choices. Adapting this cognitive linguistic framework for the analysis of literature, it was argued that the dimensions of construal, and the equivalent process of *reconstrual*, can be used to systematically analyse the ways in which readers might enrich and adjust their conceptualisations in response to the same textual cues on different readings.

In demonstration of this analytical approach, it was argued that the experience of 'The Freeze-Dried Groom' is characterised by significant contrast in its first and second readings. While a first reading of the story allows a sense of atmosphere for its fictional world alongside a distinctive tone for its focaliser, an attempt to refamiliarise the fictional world on a second reading invites greater attention to the chains of associations that underpin the narrative and to the multiple layers of conceptualisation involved in the narrative's point of view.

Investigation of the experience of re-reading and its underlying cognitive processing raises a number of questions for future research. While our discussion here has largely relied upon our introspective experiences of this text, reader response methods could allow for a better

understanding of experiences of fictional worlds during re-reading. In addition, we propose a need for further investigation of texts which surprise readers, or which feature a twist or reveal. Unlike previous research that has examined plot reversals (Emmott 2003) and world-repairs (Gavins 2000), it seems that the reconstrual invited by this ambiguous story, and perhaps by other similar texts, involves a conceptualisation of a fictional world that is not resolved or corrected as a result of the reveal, but rather gets increasingly unclear. Understanding our processing of foregrounded and backgrounded textual cues second time around – or the processes involved in our refamiliarisation of discourse (Miall and Kuiken 1994) – would seem to have wider significance for stylistic accounts of textual interpretation.

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