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Point of View in William Trevor's *Cheating at Canasta*. A Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract

This article looks at the linguistic construction of point of view in William Trevor's 2007 collection of short stories *Cheating at Canasta*. The analysis uses the methodology of stylistics and pragmatics to identify meaning-making strategies and the goals they pursue in constructing point of view. Particularly, the "modal grammar of point of view" devised by Paul Simpson in *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (1993) provides a model for connecting different text typologies based on narratorial positioning and modality with different representations of perspective in text and for identifying the linguistic strategies at work in Trevor's short stories to construct character's psychology.

Keywords: *Cheating at Canasta*, Point of View, Pragmatics, Stylistics, William Trevor

Introduction

William Trevor has been acclaimed as a keen observer of the human mind (Adams 2009) and a champion of its representation in its numberless complexities, especially as far as his short stories are concerned (Barnes 2018). In other words, the way psychological perspective is devised in his stories has been widely recognised as a prominent and distinctive feature of his style. In this connection, this article seeks to explore how perspective is constructed in his stories, which linguistic resources are employed in this process and whether any of them emerge as peculiar of Trevor's style.

The psychology of characters and of the narrator being at the heart of this enquiry, it seems appropriate to select as the corpus for analysis the short story collection *Cheating at Canasta* (2007), which displays a gallery of characters whose mind is focused on lying to themselves and others, concealing, avoiding and manipulating the truth, deceiving and, as the book title suggests, cheating in a number of ways. The volume includes a selection of eleven stories first appeared between 2004 and 2007 in *The New*

Yorker (“The Dressmaker’s Child”, “The Room”, “Men of Ireland”, “Bravado”, “An Afternoon”, “The Children”, “Faith” and “Folie a Deux”), *The Tatler* (“Cheating at Canasta” and “A Perfect Relationship”) and *The Sewanee Review* (“At Olivehill”), plus the original story “Old Flame”.

The passages used as examples in this article are excerpts from five of the abovementioned stories. In the opening piece, “The Dressmaker’s Child”, the nineteen-year-old Cahal accidentally runs over a child but flees the scene; his feelings of guilt, fear of punishment and the disturbing presence of the child’s mother in his life will haunt him. “The Children” deals with Connie’s relationship to her father after the painful loss of her mother, as he plans to remarry a family friend. In “The Room”, Katherine cheats on her husband to get to know what deceiving feels like, after experiencing deception the hard way: her husband is arrested for murdering his secret lover. “Cheating at Canasta” tells the story of the middle-aged Mallory taking a journey through Italy to return to the places he had visited with his wife before she died. “Old Flame” explores the feelings of the elderly Zoë, who reflects on her husband’s infidelity and on her marriage after his former love affair resurfaces from the past.

This article aims to look at the way point of view is shaped in these stories. In order to do so, it avails itself of the approach to linguistic analysis that is primarily concerned with revealing the inner workings of language, that is, the stylistic approach.

1. Methodology

The method adopted to analyse how perspective is constructed linguistically in *Cheating at Canasta* is that of stylistics, for a number of reasons. First, stylistics offers reliable and consolidated tools to investigate the inner mechanisms of literary texts, showing how language shapes style (Leech and Short 2007). Second, stylistics strongly relies on pragmatics to highlight how language constructs communicative effects (*ibidem*) that are actional components of texts and that liaise with contextual features and knowledge of the world, locating meaning-making in a three-dimensional setting (Grundy 2000). Third, among the studies in stylistics providing valuable analytic tools, one seems to be particularly useful in the examination and assessment of textual perspective construction: Paul Simpson’s *Language, Ideology and Point of View* (1993). Not only does this book offer a model for point of view analysis that accounts for the positioning of the narrator and of the characters in a story, but it also integrates the main principles of pragmatics in that analysis, so that they may be used to connect the notion of point of view with that of foregrounding (Short 1996; Leech and Short 2007; Douthwaite 2000) and of implicit meaning (Grice 1975).

Simpson’s model for point of view analysis reprises elements from Genette (1980), Uspensky (1973) and Fowler (1966 and 1986) to devise a more systematic and inclusive taxonomy of textual perspectives. There are two main innovative traits in this model: a clear distinction among narrator positions, and the combination of each position with three polarities – positive, negative or neutral – depending on text modality. The nine possible combinations result in nine text types based on viewpoint in text, each one having a classic author mastering that style, but resurfacing in a myriad of narrative texts from very different times, cultures and backgrounds in which similar or comparable perspectives are created and put to new uses (Simpson 1993). In this sense, this model is particularly useful to investigate Trevor’s stories, where narrator and character point of view are recognised as prominent features of the author’s style. What finds further application to Trevor’s fiction in Simpson’s model is that the similar or comparable elements entirely depend on linguistic resources and strategies, which makes it possible to recognise patterns in perspective across texts with very different themes, settings and purposes.

2. Point of View and Narrator's Position

Simpson's model draws a clear distinction between Category A narratives, told in the first person by a participating character in the story, and Category B narratives, told in the third person (Simpson 1993, 55). Category B narratives are further subdivided into two modes, which is one of the most original aspects of Simpson's model. Category B narratives may be either in Narratorial mode, that is, narrated by a detached, disembodied third-person narrator, having a bird's eye view of the narrated material; or in Reflector mode, i.e., told by a third person narrator who momentarily takes on the limited perspective of one of the characters participating in the story (*ibidem*). Category B in Narratorial mode is the prototypical narrator position associated with third-person narratives and as such it uses standard linguistic features to represent an external narrator looking at characters and at the narrated material from a distance and from above. Category B in Reflector mode is a marked narrator position since it associates third-person narratives with the limited perspective of one of the characters, thus mixing features of third-person narration with features of first-person narration. This mode is associated with specific linguistic resources creating the impression that access is provided to the active mind of a character and that the narrator's point of view is aligned with that of the character. Detecting such resources in text allows for a clear classification of narrator position that resolves the ambiguities and the problems inherent in Genette's dual structure of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narratives, assuring that a more precise notion of focalizer may be given.

According to Simpson, the main linguistic devices employed in the construction of Reflector mode are spatial deixis (69) and speech and thought presentation (70). They often appear in combination to strengthen the impression that the narrative is filtered by the mind of a character, although either of them may suffice to obtain this effect. With Reflector mode, the Reflector character is placed as the deictic centre in text, becoming the point of reference in space. As a result, the narrative is represented as coming from the limited spatial perspective of the character, although it is developed in the third person.

As far as speech and thought presentation are concerned, the most frequent technique for the construction of a Reflector is free indirect discourse (FID), where narrator's and character's voice seem to merge (*ibidem*). On the one hand, indirect discourse maintains the third person framework, consistent with the narrative of an external voice, not involved in the story. On the other hand, the free form makes elements emerge in the narrator's discourse that originate from the character: either elements of direct speech or thought that are inconsistent with the indirect framework, or ellipsis of the reporting clause, diminishing the room for the narrator's intervention and placing emphasis on the words thought or spoken by the character (23).

There is a third element frequently introducing a Reflector and being connected both with deixis and with speech and thought presentation: the association of the character with a mental process, especially of perception (vision in most cases) or of cognition (mainly thought), so as to foreground the mediating role of their mental activity. In the former case, the following utterances (even if they are narrative reports of action) are represented as mediated by the Reflector's senses, especially sight, so that the narrative seems to be the result of the Reflector's observation. In the latter case, attention is drawn to the character's active mind, so that the surrounding utterances are represented as part of their reflections. The mental process as an indicator of the presence of a Reflector is not pointed out by Simpson in his treatment of Reflector mode, but is an elaboration of the present article.

Reflector mode is a prominent feature of Simpson's model because it manages to systematise and disambiguate notions of zero, internal or external focalization and omniscience (Genette

1980), and to account for the powerful effects of a third-person narrative adopting the double perspective of a disembodied narrator who is aligned with one of the characters, thus taking on subjective qualities grounded in the view of the character.

The stories making up *Cheating at Canasta* are all told in the third person, and they all use Reflector mode extensively. Most of them establish a Reflector from the very opening lines. The opening story, “The Dressmaker’s Child”, poses the protagonist Cahal as a Reflector in the very first paragraph and carries on with this mode throughout the story, with very few exceptions in Narratorial mode (Rizzato 2014). The next passage, from “The Dressmaker’s Child”, is a case in point:

He had never seen the dressmaker close before. She was younger than he’d thought, but still looked a fair bit older than himself, maybe twelve or thirteen years. The twist in her face wasn’t ugly, but it spoilt what might have been beauty of a kind, and he remembered the flawless beauty of the Spanish girl and the silkiness of her hair. The dressmaker’s hair was black too, but wild and matted, limply straggling, falling to her shoulders. The eyes that had stared so intensely at him in the Cyber Café were bleary. Her full lips were drawn back in a smile, one of her teeth slightly chipped. Cahal walked away and she did not follow him. (Trevor 2007, 21)

As mentioned above, Cahal’s role as a Reflector is triggered by an act of sight: “He had never seen the dressmaker close before” logically presupposes he is seeing her close at this very moment. Introducing his vision pragmatically implies that the dressmaker’s physical description that follows is the result of his observation. Deixis anchors this process in space: in the opening line, the deictic “close” indicates Cahal’s proximity to the dressmaker, a vantage point allowing him to get a very accurate view of her face. The account of what her features, hair, eyes and teeth are like visually constructs a very detailed close-up, consistent with Cahal’s standing position in front of her, as is the spatial indication that her lips are “drawn back” in a smile. The deictic framework with Cahal as a point of reference in space finds some sort of closure with “Cahal walked away”, which puts an end to his ability to gaze at her, reinforced by the deictic expression “and she did not follow him”.

As explained above, spatial deixis often works in combination with speech and thought presentation to represent Reflector mode, and this sequence, so neatly delimited by deixis, is no exception. The technique in use here is free indirect discourse (FID): Cahal’s thoughts are reported indirectly in the third person, with pronominal reference and tense being adapted to the narrator’s perspective: the text reads “She was younger than he’d thought, but still looked a fair bit older than himself” rather than “She is younger than I’d thought, but still looks a fair bit older than myself”, which is the presumed wording of the character’s thought. The merging of narrator’s and character’s planes is obtained through the use of the free form, as a result of omitting a standard aspect of indirect thought proper: the reporting clause (“[He thought (that)] she was younger than he’d thought”). The reporting clause is part of the narrator’s space for commenting on the presented discourse and on the narrated material. If it is omitted, more emphasis is cast on the reported and, as a consequence, on the thoughts of the character, which is a further way of emphasising the character’s point of view in the framework of a third-person narrative. In this case, Cahal’s thinking activity focuses on the dressmaker’s looks and expresses assessment on them, especially through comparisons. He compares her age to what he thought it could be (“She was younger than he’d thought”) and to his own (“a fair bit older than himself”); he compares the twist in her features to his idea of good looks (“it spoilt what might have been beauty of a kind”) and the dressmaker’s beauty to that of the Spanish girl in the story (“and he remembered the flawless beauty of the Spanish girl”), as well as both women’s hair (“the silkiness of her hair” versus “The dressmaker’s hair was black too,

but wild and matted, limply straggling [...]”); finally, he compares the dressmaker's gaze when he last met her with the gaze he sees now (“The eyes that had stared so intensely at him in the Cyber Café were bleary”). Thus, evaluation according to Cahal's viewpoint springs not only from parts of speech specifically meant to express judgement, such as adjectives and adverbs (Simpson 1993, 57) and evaluative nouns such as “beauty”, but also from comparison which, according to Hunston and Thompson (1999, 21), is a signal of subjective value. The same authors also point out that negatives evoke their positive counterparts and therefore establish a form of evaluation (*ibidem*), and this short sequence displays a few: “never seen”, “wasn't ugly”, “she didn't follow”, all value judgements originating from Cahal's perspective which contribute to conveying what his opinion on the narrated material is.

In the next example, an excerpt from “The Children”, similar devices are at work to foreground the role of the protagonist Connie as a Reflector:

From the roof she saw a car she'd never seen before, and guessed why it had come. In one of the drawers of the rickety Welsh dresser she'd found a shopping list and thought she remembered its being lost. *Ironing starch. Baking powder*, she'd read.

The car that had come was parked in the yard when she came down from the roof. A man was standing beside it. He referred to the furniture that was to be sold, as Connie had thought he might. ‘Anyone around?’ he asked her.

He was a big red-faced man in shirtsleeves. He'd thought he'd never find the house, he said. He asked her if he was expected, if this was the right place, and she wanted to say it wasn't, but Teresa came out of the house then.

‘Go and get your father,’ she said, and Connie nodded and went to where she'd seen him from the roof. ‘Don't sell the furniture,’ she begged instead of saying the man had come. (Trevor 2007, 168-69)

As in the previous example, the character's viewing position is well grounded in space and is the deictic centre of the narrative. At the beginning of the passage, Connie dominates the scene “From the roof”, which allows her to see the car approaching the house. This triggers her mental activity, represented through her guesses, memories and thoughts.

In the next paragraph she moves down to reach the car and, as a consequence, now action takes place downstairs. Interestingly, the deictic expression used is “she came down from the roof”, as opposed to “went down”. The proximal deictic “came down” takes on the key function of representing the narrator's viewing position as internal and aligned with that of the Reflector. If the point of view were external and detached, deixis would be distal and the character's movement would be represented as viewed from a distance, through “went down” or “moved down”.

The following paragraphs confirm the proximal pattern by using “came out” to describe Theresa's movement Connie sees and “the man had come”. Both deictics reinforce the impression that narrative point of view coincides with her viewing position, within the story. The proximal deictic “this” in “if this was the right place” also aligns with the position of the participating character rather than with the position of a non-participating third-person narrator.

The deictic “this” is also part of the speech presentation technique adopted, since it reports the man's question indirectly, but retains something of what appears to be the “actually spoken words” in direct speech – “Is *this* the right place?” – rather than adapting it to the narrator's framework as standard indirect speech would impose (he asked if that was the right place).

Indirect discourse is also presented in a freer form when the reporting clause is there but is dislocated right, so that the speech reported indirectly comes first and attracts more attention than the reporting clause: “He'd thought he'd never find the house, he said”. Similarly, direct discourse either omits or right dislocates the reporting clause, with a greater effect of immediacy

as to what the Reflector sees, reads or hears: “*Ironing starch. Baking powder*, she’d read”. This strategy is used in all stories in the collection, in combination with Reflector mode, which poses it as a recognizable element of Trevor’s style.

3. *Point of View and Polarity*

In addition to Reflector mode, Simpson’s model for point of view analysis features another major original element: modality or polarity. According to Simpson (1993, 56), there are patterns in the use of modal resources in narrative texts that distinguish among positive, negative and neutral polarities, also called shadings. These patterns are related to the attitude the narrator holds in disclosing their point of view or opinion on the narrated material. The standard attitude is represented by positive polarity, which is characterised by:

- deontic and boulomaic modality, foregrounding narrator’s opinion on what character’s duties and desires are;
- evaluative adjectives and adverbs, openly expressing value judgements on the entities they modify;
- *verba sentiendi*, that is, words referring to feelings, cognition and perception;
- generic sentences, claiming to have universal truth, representing a subjective view as valid in all contexts and therefore projecting strong opinion (56-57).

These linguistic features pertain to explicit evaluation, thus collaboratively expressing the narrator’s opinion on or attitude towards the narrative. This is the unmarked polarity for a narrative, the most common and the one that does not require all the abovementioned elements to be present simultaneously to be realised: one of them may be sufficient to establish what is a standard shading for a text.

The negative polarity is characterised by:

- prominent epistemic or perception modality;
- words of estrangement (such as “perhaps”, “maybe”, “I suppose”);
- abundant physical description of characters and environments with no psychological analysis;
- comparators connecting elements of the description of characters or of the environment with figurative domains (58-59).

This combination of linguistic resources presents the narrated material for what it appears to be rather than what it is, which diminishes the narrator’s commitment to the story. The narrator is supposed to tell a story as it is, not as it seems to be. In so doing, an element of doubt, of uncertainty is cast, which creates the impression of lack of purchase on the narrated events. This polarity may be considered uncollaborative. Its champion among classic authors is Franz Kafka, but the shading recurs very often when lack of commitment in the story is representative of the interpretive faculties of the narrator/Reflector/character being impaired, for example by fear, obscured vision, an altered physical or mental state. This is a marked polarity.

The third type of polarity, which is also marked, is called neutral. Here the narrator abstains from expressing evaluation or opinion on the events in the story. The main characteristics are:

- lack of narrator’s modality;
- minimal syntactic elaboration (one clause sentences; in case of more clauses, coordination dominant over subordination);
- lack of connectivity;
- utterances constructed as narrative report of action or sequences of free direct speech where the reporting clauses are suppressed or reduced to minimal, unmarked elements

(he said, she said). The impression created by the neutral polarity is that the narrator is uninvolved and unmoved by the events in the story and that the narration is very factual and objective. For this reason, it is also associated with journalistic report style (60-61).

As far as Trevor's *Cheating at Canasta* is concerned, positive polarity is overwhelmingly prevailing. This is in line with the general purposes of a narrative text, but also with the dominance of Reflector mode mentioned above: if the narrator's point of view is aligned with that of a participating character in the story, so that the narrative is filtered by the character's active mind, it is a functional strategy to represent the character's views and opinions openly and collaboratively. Thus, this shading contributes to a well-rounded construction of the Reflector's point of view. It is not by chance that the excerpts from "The Dressmaker's Child" and "The Children" analysed above are in the positive polarity and provide a straightforward representation of the thoughts and opinions of characters. This also explains at least in part the psychological precision assigned to Trevor in depicting his characters' minds and emotions. For example, the passage from "The Dressmaker's Child" quoted above abounds in evaluative adjectives ("younger", "older", "ugly", "flawless", "wild and matted", "straggling", "falling", "bleary", "full", "chipped") and adverbs ("close", "limply", "intensely", "slightly"). These evaluative elements are all consistent with Cahal's view of the dressmaker's face and the comparison he draws between her and the Spanish girl met in his garage at the beginning of the story, and they all help shaping his opinion on her looks and cooperatively conveying it to the reader. The passage is also rich in *verba sentiendi*, such as "seen", "thought", "looked", "remembered", "stared" and "smile". Evaluative adjectives and *verba sentiendi* are among the most explicit evidence of positive polarity, although there are other elements of positivity, including inherently evaluative nouns such as "twist", "spoil", "beauty", all expressing Cahal's assessment of the dressmaker's appearance. The passage from "The Children" conveys positive polarity mainly through *verba sentiendi*: "saw", "seen" and "thought" occurring twice, "guessed", "remembered", "find", "expected", "wanted". The numerous words of perception, feeling and cognition foreground the active mind of the characters, with a special emphasis on the Reflector's, and their reactions to the situation.

Conversely, negative polarity does not seem to be significantly used in *Cheating at Canasta*. What is used sparsely but significantly is the neutral shading. This shading applied to Reflector mode is not a prototypical combination: with Reflector mode the point of view of the narrator is aligned with that of the character, providing an opportunity for accessing their mind, but with the neutral polarity evaluation is not expressed, which makes it even more difficult to recognise Reflector mode. The Reflector is usually constructed through deixis and perceptual clues as to what is in his or her view, with very little or no related commentary. The following example, taken from "The Dressmaker's Child", is a case in point:

He turned out on to the Loye road. Spanish was spoken in the back of the car. The radio wasn't working or he'd have put it on for company. The car was a black Ford Cortina with a hundred and eighty thousand miles on the clock; his father had taken it in part-exchange. They'd use it until the tax disc expired and then put it aside for spares. (Trevor 2007, 7)

The Reflector's point of view is established by placing Cahal as the deictic centre of this scene: "He turned out on to the Loye road" emphasises his position as a driver, "Spanish was spoken in the back of the car" foregrounds his mental activity by mentioning what he can hear from his position, and this creates the conditions for us to interpret the next sentences as the thoughts triggered by his immediate surroundings as he drives. The detachment suggested by the lack of evaluation seems to be representative of a moment of absent-mindedness, in which Cahal freely associates stimuli from his immediate environment and everyday life experiences

in what appears as spontaneous thought. This also offers an opportunity for characterization: he is a car mechanic just like his father is and he is prone to thinking of cars and the uses you can make of them.

In this story, the neutral shading is also used for the central incident around which the narrative revolves:

It was then, just after they'd passed the dead trees, that the child ran out. She came out of the blue cottage and ran at the car. He'd heard of it before, the child on this road who ran out at cars. It had never happened to himself, he'd never even seen a child there any time he'd passed, but often it was mentioned. He felt the thud no more than a second after the headlights picked out the white dress by the wall and then the sudden movement of the child running out.

Cahal didn't stop. In his mirror the road had gone dark again. He saw something white lying there but said to himself he had imagined it. In the back of the Cortina the embrace continued. (11)

The first paragraph is in the positive polarity, like most of the narrative: when facing the unexpected event, the Reflector collaboratively renders what he already knows about it and what he experiences at that very moment. In the next paragraph, however, things change. Cahal is still the Reflector, well-grounded in space and in the visual perspective it offers ("In his mirror the road had gone dark again", "He saw something white lying there", "In the back of the Cortina the embrace continued"). However, he no longer expresses opinion on the events: "Cahal didn't stop", the following sentence and the last one are one-clause sentences displaying minimal syntactic elaboration. The third sentence includes two clauses coordinated by "but", which is one of the simplest conjunctions, expressing a minimal amount of evaluation. The neutral polarity for this very dramatic scene, having fundamental consequences on the narrative, marks a stark contrast with the expected attitude of the narrator. This creates an implicature: this sequence stands out as deviant and attracts remarkable attention, making the readers ask themselves why such a clash of polarities is represented and making the sequence memorable to them.

4. *Point of View and Foregrounding*

The phenomenon of foregrounding is closely related with point of view in that it maximises the salience of an element in the narrative by making it stand out as bigger, more vivid and more striking than its surroundings (Short 1996; Douthwaite 2000; Leech and Short 2007). When the narrative is in Reflector mode, foregrounding is intertwined with the Reflector's point of view. In other words, the Reflector's perspective is fundamental in constructing the elements in the narrative that acquire importance, salience and that appear to be particularly vivid and striking. This effect may be achieved in many ways and is usually the result of the combination of more foregrounding techniques. The following examples illustrate some of the techniques most frequently at work in the selected *corpus* of stories.

In the following excerpt from "The Room", the protagonist Katherine's role as a Reflector is readily established and this interacts with what is foregrounded:

She pulled the edge of the curtain back a little so that the light fell more directly on the room's single looking-glass. She tidied her hair, still brown, no grey in it yet. Her mother's hadn't gone grey at all, and her grandmother's only when she was very old, which was something Katherine hoped she wouldn't have to be; she was forty-seven now. Her dark eyes gazed back at her from her reflection, her lipstick smudged, an emptiness in her features that had not to do with the need to renew her makeup. Her beauty was ebbing – but slowly, and there was beauty left. (Trevor 2007, 25)

Katherine is posed as the deictic centre of the scene in the very first sentence: she moves the curtain so as to cast more light on the looking-glass, which implies she intends to use it. The narrative report that follows therefore emerges as the result of her looking into the mirror (“She tidied her hair, still brown, no grey in it yet”) and her thoughts triggered by it (“Her mother’s hadn’t gone grey at all [...]; she was forty seven now”). At this point a striking image is obtained through a deviant transitivity pattern: “Her dark eyes gazed back at her” represents her eyes as sensors in a mental process, whereas “her” features as the phenomenon, reversing the usual participant roles in such a process, where the sener is prototypically human. This reversal is representative of the mediating role of the mirror in constructing Katherine’s point of view and confers intensity and agency to her eyes in her mirror reflection. The intensity is also emphasised by the use of “gazed”, a marked verb of seeing, conveying purpose and force to the process.

Further strategies are at work in this sequence to build salient meaning around the central moment. Parallelism combines with ellipsis in “still brown, no grey in it yet” to starkly contrast brown with grey, and the presence of the former (“still brown”) with the absence of the latter (“no grey [...] yet”) in the here and now, as marked by the temporal deictics in chiasitic distribution. Ellipsis of the copula, of conjunctions and of other function words characterises both phrases, enhancing the semantic density of the contrasted elements (Simpson 1993, 27). A similar structure may be detected in “her lipstick smudged, an emptiness in her features”, again drawing attention to the observed traits in her face. Parallelism also typifies the last sentence of this paragraph, split into two parts by a dash and displaying the repetition of “beauty”, which “was ebbing” in the first part, and is said to be “left” in the second – a marked expression referring to it as a commodity, thus also contributing a special flavour to the description of her own looks by the Reflector.

Similar foregrounding strategies are to be identified in a number of stories from the collection under analysis. The eponymous “Cheating at Canasta”, for example, achieves the same semantic density obtained through ellipsis as in “still brown, no grey in it yet” and “her lipstick smudged, an emptiness in her features”, in “glasses raised”.

A table for six was lively in a corner, glasses raised; a birthday celebration it appeared to be. A couple who hadn’t booked, or had come too early, were sent away. A tall, thin woman looked about her, searching for someone who wasn’t there. The last time, Mallory remembered, their table had been by the door. (Trevor 2007, 63)

In this passage, we also see another instance of foregrounding through a deviant use of transitivity (Simpson 1993, 103): the relational process “was lively”, usually associated with live beings, is predicated of a “table for six”, which metonymically presupposes the presence of six people, but which presents the group as an impersonal, loud entity. The reason for this is probably that this is the view the Reflector has. The second clause in the sentence achieves foregrounding through thematization and left dislocation: subject attribute “a birthday celebration” is placed in thematic position instead of after the copula, which also constructs a very unusual end of the sentence with “it appeared to be”. To make sense of the implicature, it must be inferred that “a birthday celebration” is a sudden thought which the observation of the lively table elicits, and therefore the nominal element is the first to spring up. The next two sentences are parallel narrative reports of what is going on in the restaurant. These elements are all consistent with the Reflector’s viewing position, while sitting at his table. The presence of a Reflector is made explicit only in the last sentence through mention of his thinking activity, “Mallory remembered”, in the context of connecting the present scene with a previous visit to the same restaurant. But the elements of foregrounding standing out at the beginning of the sequence were already telling of his active mind being at work and were thus implicitly constructing Reflector mode.

Implicit meaning is also key to all the stories in the collection. The incipit of “Old Flame” provides a brilliant example in this sense:

Grace died.

As Zoë replaces the lid of the electric kettle – having steamed the envelope open – her eye is caught by that stark statement. As she unfolds the plain white writing-paper, another random remark registers before she begins to read from the beginning. *We never quarrelled not once that I remember.*

The spidery scrawl, that economy with punctuation, were once drooled over by her husband, and to this day are not received in any ordinary manner, as a newspaper bill is, or a rates demand. Because of the sexual passion there has been, the scrawl connects with Charles’s own neat script, two parts of a conjunction in which letters have played an emotional part. Being given to promptness in such matters, Charles will at once compose a reply, considerate of an old flame’s due. Zoë feared this correspondence once, and hated it. *As ever my love, Audrey:* in all the years of the relationship the final words have been the same. (Trevor 2007, 173, italics in original)

Zoë is introduced as the Reflector through a perception process: “her eye is caught”, which poses her vision as central and represents her as the person who is reading the letter she has opened. Also “another random remark registers before she begins to read” places her as the centre of consciousness, so that not only the following element of direct speech (a quotation from the letter) features as the result of her act of reading, but also the next paragraph, expressing comments on the letter and memories triggered by it, stands as a product of her reflections.

The three instances of direct speech (“*Grace died*”, “*We never quarrelled not once that I remember*” and “*As ever my love, Audrey*”) stand out against an extended background written in another discourse presentation mode: narrative report. They also stand out graphologically, since they are the only statements written in italics in the whole passage, and provide structure to the sequence by representing the starting point, a passage in the middle and the conclusion of the letter. Graphological deviation¹ also marks “*We never quarrelled not once that I remember*”, where a comma is missing before “not”, a feature that is reprised in the Reflector’s thoughts expressed in the next paragraph through “that economy with punctuation”, suggesting that she has noticed this tendency in previous letters.

This point leads us to another foregrounding technique which is well represented in this passage. Here an arresting effect is created by presenting something extremely unusual and problematic according to our knowledge of the world – Zoë going through her husband’s private correspondence, as she did many times before, being aware of her husband’s affair with Audrey and apparently not doing anything about it. This has a surprising, possibly disturbing effect, as it flouts our expectations about what a marital relationship should be like and clashes with what we consider socially acceptable in many ways. It is, however, revealing of the psychology of the character.

Similarly revealing is another linguistic feature that concurs to the construction of extra meaning through implicitness. Information that is new and would allow for opinionated commentary, especially from the point of view of a woman who has been cheated on all her life, is presented as given information through the existential presuppositions triggered by the determiner “the” (Simpson 1993, 125): “the envelope”, “the plain white writing-paper” and “the relationship” pose the three noun heads of the phrases as given and familiar, although they are not to the reader, who needs to work on implicit clues to fully make sense of the meaning of this text. This is once again

¹ Phonological foregrounding is also used, as in other stories (Rizzato 2014, 202 and 2016, 100), to underline the import of some expressions: in this sequence, “stark statement” and “spidery scrawl” alliterate on /s/ and “random remark registers” alliterates on /r/.

in line with the representation of the Reflector's point of view: such information is familiar to Zoë, who is used to Audrey's letters coming in and to reading them in secret, so representing these items as given information is a consistent part of Reflector mode and of the representation of Zoë's genuine way of thinking². In addition, given information is something that is linguistically not up for debate or discussion and is represented as less "interesting" than new information (Hunston and Thompson 1999, 33), and it is so for Zoë who has directly experienced the events in the story and has had decades to come to terms with this situation. This feeling of calm acceptance, however, will probably clash with the reader's response to the first experience of this narrative, which contributes to presenting Zoë's psychological stance as interesting, deviant and original.

Conclusion

The application of a stylistic and pragmatic method, and particularly of Simpson's model for point of view analysis, to Trevor's short stories included in the collection *Cheating at Canasta* reveals that a number of linguistic strategies are consistently adopted to construct subtle and unexpected perspectives in text. First of all, the combination of deixis and free forms of discourse, among which free indirect discourse prevails, constructs the role of the Reflector in all stories. Thus, in all stories significant parts of the text present a third-person narrator whose physical and/or psychological position is aligned with that of a character who acts as the centre of consciousness in the narrative. In addition, the sequences in Reflector mode are mostly in the positive polarity, which strengthens the representation of the Reflector character's views, opinions, feelings and values. A limited number of sequences in Reflector mode are in the neutral polarity, which marks them as deviant and draws attention to the different attitude adopted by the character towards the events in the narrative. Further, foregrounding techniques are employed to reinforce the effects produced by Reflector mode that are in keeping with the physical and psychological position of the character. Being at work in all the stories of the collection, these strategies may be identified as part of the stylistic features of the stories included in *Cheating at Canasta* and an important set of tools in the achievement of their stylistic effects.

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² A similar presentation of new information as given to foreground the Reflector as the source of the represented thoughts was also detected in the story "Cheating at Canasta" (Rizzato 2016, 96).

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