A fictional dialogue against selected linguistic outlooks on spoken language and conversation

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Abstract

This work provides an analysis of the fictional dialogue of the first chapter of *Faith*, a novel by the British writer and novelist, Lesley Pearse. The choice of the novel itself is not considered key. It is most important though that it is a recent novel, with up-to-date topics relevant to an ordinary person. The research question that this author attempts to answer is the extent to which the FD (fictional dialogue) of the first chapter of the novel is similar to real talk and conversation. To this end the FD as a mimetic camouflage is discussed against selected cognitive, processing and pragmatic models of speech, talk and discourse. The analysis suggests that in many respects the FD of the first chapter of *Faith* is indeed a gross simplification of the processes that real talk involves. However, this is only to be expected given the contention that it only constitutes the writer's construal of a prison conversation between women inmates. The FD contains only selected features of real talk. These, however, suffice for the reader to mentally simulate an entire scene.

Keywords: fictional dialogue, narrative, strategy, conversational move, intonation unit, episode, topic, mimetic camouflage, mental simulation, banter, style

1. Introduction

Stories[1] tend to be organised by a familiar schema involving: abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, coda and denouement (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, pp. 12–44). These components are used selectively depending on the

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[1] Labov & Waletzky (1967) make a distinction between the two related terms *narrative* and *story.* The meaning and use of the former term is restricted to a sequence of at least two clauses with so-called *narrative juncture, i.e.*, a situation when the temporal scope of one clause and event does not overlap fictionalwith the other clause's and event's temporal scope. Morover, the former clause (event) is construed as the cause of the latter clause (event). For example, *John slipped and he fell down the stairs.* This author, however, will use the terms *story* and *narrative* interchangably.

occasioning contexts in which they are produced (Ervin-Tripp & Küntay, 1997, pp. 13–166).

Novels provide innumerable numbers of stories that contain both narrators and fictional dialogues. Different functions and features of the latter were discussed by Bronwen (2012), Fludernik (2003). This article has a limited goal to focus on the use of fictional dialogue as a representation of real-life conversation, or a mimetic camuflage in the first chapter of the novel *Faith* (2007) by the contemporary British writer Lesley Pearse. No attempt is undertaken to classify the novel to any of the past or present literary trends. This work remains neutral as regards the possible and potentially interesting question whether *Faith* is in any way characteristic or different than other modern British novels. Thus, section two will provide a brief orientation to the novel, its main characters and the theme followed by section three that will deal with different aspects of fictional dialogue as a representation of real conversations.

2. Orientation and entry point to *Faith*

At the beginning of the first chapter of the novel the reader encounters a few key characters. Laura Branningham is in prison for murder of her best friend, Jackie, but she insists she is not guilty. She has been jailed for two years and is beginning to lose hope whether she will ever be free again. Feeling depressed, she suddenly receives a letter from Stuart, her former friend and lover. The man has faith Laura has not committed the crime and is determined to help find evidence of her innocence.

Already at the beginning the reader is invited to overhear a conversation between Laura Braningham, who is in her late fifties and Donna Fergusson, an overweight young lady who works at the prison canteen.

1) DF: Dried up auld fuckwit!
   LB: I may be old and dried-up but broccoli keeps my wits sharp and my body slim, Maybe you should try it.

This scene and the whole chapter one belong somewhere in the middle of the whole story that the novel presents. It is only after Stewart's letter to Laura is delivered at the end of chapter one that the poor woman's memories of what has happened come alive. The first chapter analysed here contains the voices of the narrator and the fictional conversation in the prison for female offenders, Cortnon Vale, near Stirling in Scotland.

3. Fictional dialogue as a representation of reality

As was hinted in the introduction, *conversations* and *fictional dialogue* differ dramatically though authors construe the latter to resemble real speech. *Realism* is defined in the Wikipedia as:

> […] art movement beginning with mid-nineteenth-century French literature (Stendhal), and Russian literature (Alexander Pushkin) and extending to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[…] Literary realism attempts to represent familiar things as they are. Realist authors chose to depict every day and banal activities and experiences, instead of using a romanticized or similarly stylized presentation. […] Broadly defined as "the faithful representation of reality" or "verisimilitude," realism is a literary technique practised by many schools of writing. Although strictly speaking, realism is a technique, it also denotes a particular kind of subject matter, especially the representation of middle-class life.

One feature that is most relevant for the discussion of fictional dialogue in this paper is the attempt made by novelists to mimic real life situations.

The following figure presents an intricate network of relations involved in reading a fictional dialogue.
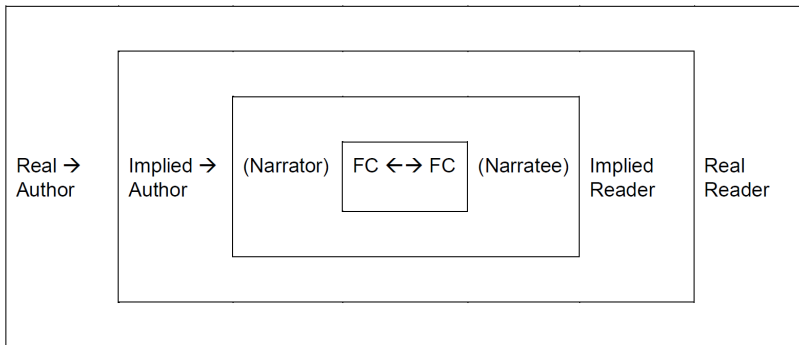

Fig. 1. Levels of narration (Rimmon-Kenan, 1986, p. 86) and (Phelan, 2005, p. 12)

Only the outer rectangle refers to the real world. The voice of the writer is mediated via the *implied author*, i.e. a "version of a writer […] an official scribe […] that a reader constructs based on the text in its entirety […]" (Nordquist, 2010). Similarly, apart from the actual reader of a novel, the construct of the *implied reader* has been proposed by Wolfgang Iser (1974, p. 271) to "cover the

whole range of reading effects, […] inferred on the basis of textual evidence rather than on an analysis of real reader responses." Moreover, the next level inside the embedded circles in the diagram above represents the concepts of *narrator* and *narratee*. Proposed by structural narratology, the latter term designates a recipient category not necessarily equivalent to the reader, associated with a kind of narrator's listener. This concept was omitted in post classical narratology and considered only tangentially important. Finally, one reaches the level of fictional dialogue at which characters' so-called spoken, imagined interactions are presented. The above characterisation suggests that even when only two characters interact, such communication involves a few real and fictional agents.

3.1. Features of fictional dialogue in chapter one of *Faith*

Fictional dialogues in general exhibit a selection of features of natural dialogues that trigger a reader's mental simulation (cf. Bergen, 2012) of a natural dialogue or conversation. In other words, various selected features of a fictional dialogue act as entry points to rich conceptualisations of past or imagined experience. For example, it suffices to use one feature of Scottish accent perhaps coupled with a description of a place to enable rich imagery of possible language production.

This section will discuss the following phenomena relevant to the fictional dialogue in chapter one of *Faith*: layout, conversational moves and turn taking, continuity and flow of topics as well as variable numbers and size of intonation units, the use of narrator speech tags and some pragmatic phenomena of FD. Though the analysis focuses on the features one can observe in the data of the fictional dialogue of the relevant chapter, on some occasions commentary will be offered on features of natural speech that the writer of *Faith* did not use.

3.1.1. Layout, conversational moves and perspective taking

To start with, fictional dialogue (FD) and narrator's voices are clearly marked off by single inverted commas. The narrator's additional information on the manner, mannerism, facial expressions, gestures, kinesics, proxemics and other non-verbal cues concurrent to a verbal speech act are kept together in the same paragraph. Comprising a portion of a FD, such a paragraph tends to be initiated by a conversational move.

A conversational move is a speech act (Austin, 1963; Searle, 1985) that increments a developing topic. It can add content, in which case it is substantive or has a discourse managing function and can be referred to as *house-keeping*. The latter type is further divided into *genre specific* and *content specific*. Moreover, three

other types of moves were proposed by (Weiner & Goodenough, 1977, p. 218): *passing*, *summarizing* and *topic opening*.

The model briefly summarized above was proposed as an attempt to find a production and comprehension unit of analysing psychological and social dimensions of conversational data. Its authors (Weiner & Goodenough, 1977, pp. 216–218) focused on the house-keeping moves because, as they claimed, "they are more amenable to research analysis then substantive moves." While topics of verbal conversations are theoretically limitless, the repertoire of the housekeeping (conversation managing) moves is relatively small.

Interestingly, by contrast to Weiner & Goodenough (1977), who notice that speech production models are outnumbered by linguistic outlooks on comprehension, Lambert (1981) observes that fictional dialogues in general tend to assume the producer's perspective, at least as speech tags go. This preoccupation with speech acts that usually describe what a language producer is doing with language is taken issue with by Sternberg (1986), who recommends directing attention to how a character interlocutor processes language aimed at her/him. Novelists, as if, by default tend to assume the producer's perspective though some comprehension effects could, in theory, be present in the narrator's voice. The following example [2] from *Faith*, could be rewritten to include the listener's perspective. This example shows two women inmates. Maureen looks smart as her daughter is coming to visit her in prison.

2) 'Aye, my Jenny's coming,' Maureen replied, her voice lifting from its usual dejected tone. 'That's great,' Laura exclaimed.

3) 'Aye, my Jenny's coming,' Maureen replied, her voice lifting from its usual dejected tone *and Laura understood that she was very happy as her voice seemed to be less dull than usual*. 'That's great,' *Laura exclaimed to the effect that it hit home with Maureen that Laura listened and they were connecting*.

Though possible, such a solution seems odd as it takes more time to write and read. Moreover, reading example [3] requires constant switching of perspective between language producer and receiver, which incurs cognitive costs.

As regards the choice of perspective, research on mental simulation during narrative comprehension[2] (Sato, Sakai, Wu, & Bergen, 2012) suggests that the third person narrator's commentary can be additionally either *omniscient* or

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[2] One thing that is quite clear from recent work on language processing is that comprehenders construct detailed mental representations of scenes that they read or listen to. These are variously described in different literatures as situation models (Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998) or mental simulations (Barsalou, 1999).

objective, i.e., it either "has access to the mental states of characters [or] only describes how characters would appear to an observer." In the former case, and despite the 3rd voice of the narrator, readers tend to assume the internal character's perspectives, as if their own, whereas in the latter one they assume the perspective of a third person.

The experimental task of the study described above (Sato, Sakai, Wu, & Bergen, 2012) asked the participants to read 24 pairs of short narratives that had a key sentence describing a character manipulating the given object with a hand (e.g.: *threw away, grabbed, peeled off, picked up*). Participants took significantly longer to decide that a sentence and a picture matched if the independent variable, i.e., the perspectives that they represented, were different. The following figure demonstrates example images used in this study.
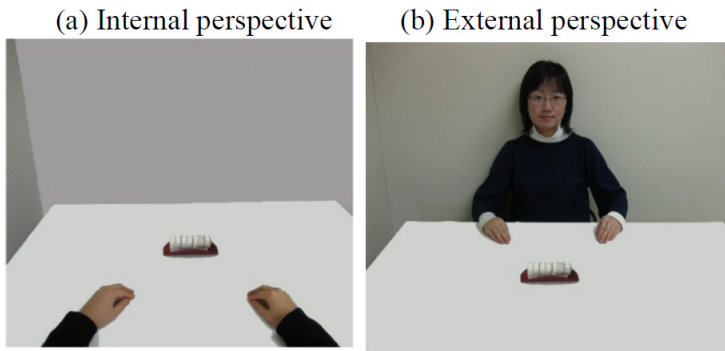
(a) Internal perspective   (b) External perspective

Fig 2. Images used in the study on perspective taking depending on the kind of 3rd person narrator: omniscient or objective (right) (Sato, Sakai, Wu & Bergen, 2012)

Two example narratives are also quoted below after Sato, Sakai, Wu, & Bergen (2012).

4) Third person omniscient narrative

She was very uncomfortable because her hands felt sticky and there was still clay under her nails from her ceramics class. She desperately wanted to wash her hands, but could not see a sink anywhere. She could feel the clay drying even more and eyed the small towel on the table. She picked up the hand towel.

5) Third person objective narrative

She appeared out of breath when she rushed into the room. She looked down at the table, where there was a hand towel. Her hands were covered with clay, and she glanced back and forth between her clay-covered hands and the towel. She picked up the hand towel

Example [4] uses vocabulary referring to the character's subjective mental states: *uncomfortable, hands <u>felt</u> sticky*, *desperately wanted, could feel*. The reader's (character-internal) viewpoint is instructed by the omniscient construal of the scene.

The language of the FD in the first chapter of *Faith* tends to be matter of fact and mundane.

6) L: Thanks Maureen.
   M: Did I commit a cardinal sin by wanting more broccoli?
   You're looking very nice today. Expecting a visitor?

7) L: That I am.
   M: Just to look at her pretty wee face again will be enough. She's thirty now, with a second wean on the way, and I didnae even know I had a grandson.

Example [6] seems so natural that it is easy to imagine one must engage in similar conversations all the time. Likewise, [7] mimics a natural conversation, but it also helps build a small fragment of the narrative as the reader finds out about Maureen daughter's visit.

In sum, conversational moves in the first chapter of *Faith* are signalled with inverted commas coupled with accompanying speech tags implicitly suggesting to readers which perspective (language producer's or comprehender's, omniscient or objective) to select. Typically, a reader encounters two moves constituting an exchange between conversational participants and such an exchange is framed in a single paragraph. Moreover, mostly substantive moves are used to the almost compete exclusion of the housekeeping moves. The next section will look at the appearance and development of topics as well as the role and use of intonation units in the FD of the first chapter of *Faith*.

3.1.2. Flow of ideas, topics and intonation units

This section analyses the sample of the FD in the 1st chapter of *Faith* against research into how one can look at data of spoken language and learn about thought processes. Chafe (1994, 2000) identifies a unit of thought with a single act of attention/consciousness. Such a single act of attention is in turn coded in the form of the so-called *intonation unit*. Intonation units are identified in data of spoken language by a selection of phonetic and conceptual criteria. Phonetically, every such a unit tends to begin either with or without a pause, has a falling intonation at the end, the last word can be sometimes prolonged (anacrusis), and there is greater stress on it as well. Conceptually, every intonation unit expresses one idea. A focus of thought (attention or consciousness) is constantly moving, engaged on, disengaged, changed and placed on another idea, object or person. Moreover, a focus of experience is

embedded in a semi-active "fringe" and no intonation unit functions alone. Instead, it is "always part of a sequence in which the successive foci can be related to each other in a variety of ways" to form topics (Chafe, 2000, p. 621).

> This notion of a "topic or subject about which all the members of the thought revolve" is the key to the movement and direction observable in thought and language. Especially cogent is the statement that introducing a new topic creates an "aching gap" demanding to be filled. A topic is a coherent aggregate of ideas, arising either in silent thought or introduced by some participant in a conversation. In the course of a conversation we find segments of varying length during which one or more individuals "talk about the same thing." These topics can be identified from their content, but usually there are phonetic cues as well: often a longer than normal pause before a new topic is introduced, often heightened pitch, loudness, acceleration, or a new voice quality at the beginning and a tapering off of these prosodic features at the end. Contributions from interlocutors, too, may signal where topics begin and end.

The development of topics in speech depends on the activation of schemas and interaction (contributions) by participants of conversations.

The fictional dialogue in chapter one of *Faith* can be thought of as an episode (Chafe, 1994) with more than one topic. The novel presents four characters: Laura, Maureen, a prison officer and a person who works at the prison canteen. The following mini-topics can be identified:

a) Laura is served lunch and is told off for wanting more broccoli →

b) Laura sits at the same table as Maureen and they comment on what has happened in (a) →

c) Since Maureen looks unusually nice, the topic of Maureen's daughter comes up. Laura is told Maureen has written to her daughter from prison to tell her how she feels about her →

d) Laura says she thinks Jenny (the daughter who is coming to visit) must have learnt how bad Maureen's husband was to her (she had driven into him and killed). That is why she in prison now →

e) At this point another topic, Laura's innocence, is brought forth, but only for a very brief moment after which both speakers return to topic (d) →

f) Laura instructs Maureen how she should speak with her daughter Jenny, who is visiting Maureen in prison soon. →

g) Maureen is surprised why Laura does not have any visitors and adds that she must have had some men who were interested in her. Laura also explains her predicament, reflects on what kind of person she is and that she treated people badly, but she has not killed her best friend, Jackie →

h) The prison guard announces a man, Laura's former friend, comes to visit her, but he is not allowed in because he has not booked a visit.

The arrows designate the idea put forward by the cognitive model of speech production presented by Chafe (1994) that topics naturally arise and flow. The first topic [a] is fuelled by the conditions of living in a prison, where good manners and politeness give way to aggression displayed not only between inmates but, as in this case, between prison staff and women prisoners. Next, topic [b] naturally follows as a commentary between Laura and Maureen. Then, topic [c] arises from Maureen's unusually good appearance, which attracts Laura's attention, followed by [d], which consists of a sequence of attentional foci and their correlate intonation units. Similarly, the remaining topics do not appear at random but constitute a predictable trajectory given the context of the entire episode and chapter one.

To illustrate the flow of topics, the actual portion of the FD from topic [a] to [d] is provided below without speech tags.

8) *Topic a*

DF: Dried up auld fuckwit!
LB: I may be old and dried-up but broccoli keeps my wits sharp and my body slim. Maybe you should try it.

Topic b

MC: Come and sit by me, Law. Us auld fuckwits should stick together!
LB: Thanks Maureen. Did I commit a cardinal sin by wanting more broccoli?

Topic c

LB: You're looking very nice today. Expecting a visitor?
MC: Aye, my Jenny's coming.
LB: That's great. What changed her mind?
MC: I done what you said and wrote and told her how I felt about her. Maybe it was that.

Topic d

LB: I expect your husband has shown his true colours to her too. And your younger children will probably have told Jenny things they saw and heard him doing to you in the past. She'll have weighed it all up and realized you were at your wits' end.

As was mentioned before, the lower and less schematic level at which thought operates is a single focus of attention-consciousness. Its linguistic correlate is referred to as the *intonation unit*. The following brief extract of speech occurring while a family are planning a holiday is provided below based on data from the

Birmingham Corpus (cf. McCarthy & Carter, 1997) with divisions into different kinds of intonation units (cf. Badio, 2004; Chafe, 1994).

9)	Yeah,	regulatory
	^we'll just ^leave the ^car ^^behind,	substantive
	… and ^go on the ^^bus.	substantive
	Or ^go on the . ^trains.	substantive
	… ^^I reckon ^that's what we should do.	substantive
	yeah	regulatory
	….. the ^only ^^problem that we've	
	^got ^then is er … ^carrying ^luggage.	substantive
	Yeah,	regulatory

Weiner and Goodenough's term *house-keeping mo*ves (1977) is substituted here by Chafe's (1994) term *substantive* intonation units, which are used to code the content of what is said. The *regulatory intonation units* are spurts of language used to make sure that the communication channel is open, that speakers stay focused and there is mutual understanding. They fall under three subcategories of *textual* (*so, so anyway* [when a new topic is begun]*, but*), *cognitive* (*believe it or not, I remember, for some reason, I think, I mean it, I suppose, er … I don't know, Yeah, oh I see, ok, got it, what do you mean*) and *interactional* (*yes*, [eye contact, nodding, gestures], *cause you know, eh .. so anyway, you know, great, love it, hm, sorry, and as you can see, really, but I tell you what, thank you*).

The FD in chapter one of *Faith* compares unfavourably with real life samples of speech with regard to the amount of intonation units of the regulatory type.[3] Research into spoken data (Badio, 2004) suggests that the regulatory units constitute approximately 27% of all intonation units. It should also not be surprising that the actual amount of speech regulation depends on a topic (e.g., well-practised vs. new), speaker's level of stress, complexity of the topic, relation between participants and amount of background knowledge speakers share. These are only some parameters of the variety of contexts in which real speech takes place.

The FD in chapter one of *Faith* contains very few regulatory units and the conversation focuses on the content or substance of talk. The reader as if overhears Laura and Maureen talk; s/he is invited to hear the sometimes intimate exchanges between them, which hugely attracts attention during reading and invites the assumption of the characters' omniscient perspective.

A comparison of descriptive statistics is presented below regarding the use of substantive units in a corpus of spoken data (Badio, 2004) and the FD analysed here.

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[3] The FD dialogue in *Faith* only imitates speech of course, so this work treats them as if they were said.

Tab. 1. Descriptive statistics comparing real life speech and FD of chapter one in the novel *Faith*

Statistic	Real life conversational data > 2900 units	FD of chapter one in *Faith*, 46 units
Min.	1	1
Max	20	25
Range	19	24
Mean	5.7	8.7
Median	5	8
Mode	4	4.1
St. dev.	2.99	4.92
Std Error of the mean	0.06	0.72

Before the interpretation of the above descriptive statistics is provided, an explanation is needed of how the substantive units were assessed if a FD is only the writer's intuition of what constitutes real conversations.

The FD in the first chapter of *Faith* involves short phrases and sentences such as:

10) Try not to mention her father.

11) That I am.

12) I was a bad woman.

13) It means a lot that you believe in me.

Examples [10–13] can easily be imagined as single intonation units and single foci of consciousness-attention. Some other sentences are complex and long:

14) And a good man too, but us women are often guilty of not recognizing a man's true worth until it's too late.

15) But now I've been convicted of her murder, the few people I liked to think of as friends vanished, and there's no one left that gives a jot about me.

However, such cases were analysed as two intonation units on account of the observation that a comma was used to separate the superordinate and subordinate clauses. Chafe (1994) used commas in transcription of real-life speech to separate different intonation units, which indicated a suspended intonation contour, when

a certain idea was not terminated and at least another intonation unit and focus to round it up was necessary. By contrast, such examples as (16) were counted as containing one focus and presumably one intonation unit. They are very rare in real speech.

16) And your younger children will probably have told Jenny things they saw and heard him doing to you in the past

The comparison of the descriptive statistics regarding the length of intonation units in real life speech samples and the FD leads to the conclusion that intonation units in the FD of chapter one tend to be generally longer (*M real--speech*=5.7; *M fict.-dial.*=8.7). Interestingly, the same is true of the median of the two values, whereas the mode, i.e., the most frequent value was 4 words long for both samples. The inferential statistics *t*-test indicated that there is a robust difference between the two sets of data (*df*=46; *t*=-3.98; *p*=.0001). In other words, the present analysis highlights a statistically significant difference between the real life speech data and the FD as regards the average length of intonation units.

Two bar graphs are provided below to further illustrate this difference. They present percentages of intonation units of variable lengths in the two data sets of real and FD conversations.
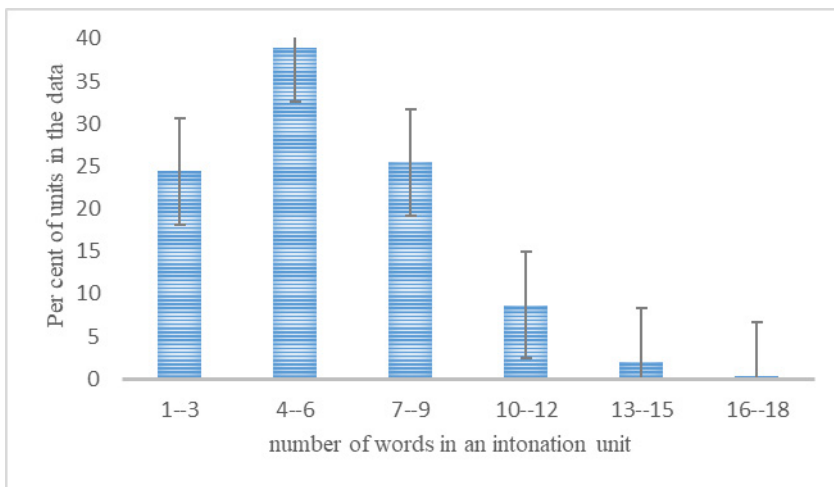

Fig. 3. Percentages of intonation units in the real life sample of speech
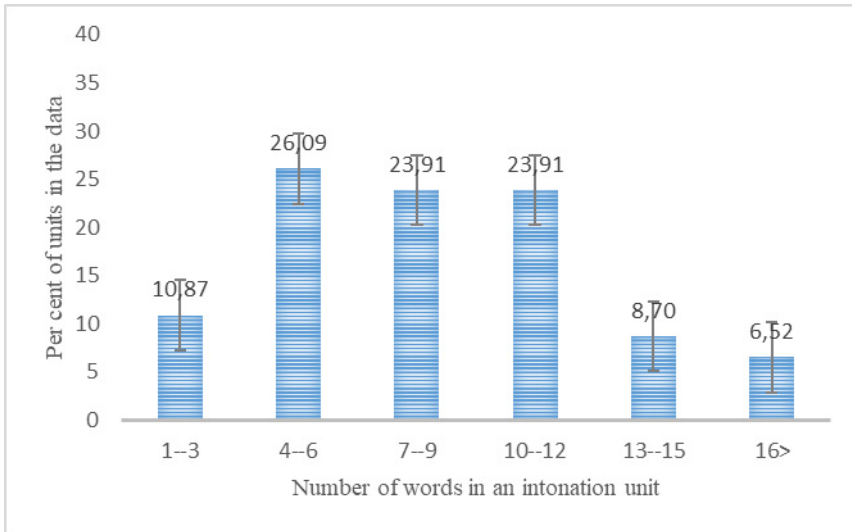(based on: Badio, 2004)

Fig. 4. Percentages of units in the fictional dialogue in chapter one of *Faith*

Some intonation units in the FD are even as long as 16 words, which is very unusual of real samples of speech. Moreover, all intonation units of the FD are substantive, compared to real spoken data in which a large percentage of units perform some (textual, cognitive, interactional) function (cf. Badio, 2004).

4. Speech tags as part of the FD

Speech tags are an inseparable part of the analysed FD. They provide information on various features of context and phonetic qualities accompanying speech. One pattern that can be detected comprises the use of a verb referring to speech followed by a verb that describes accompanying or subsequent action.

17) Donna Ferguson said loudly and scathingly as she dolloped broccoli on to Laura Brannigan's plate

18) Laura said, taking her up on her offer.

19) Laura said as she began to eat.

20) Beady said, holding out the sheet of paper.

21) Beady said with a wide smile.

In examples [17, 19, 20, 21] speech and accompanying activity are co-temporal. In [18] Laura agreed to join Maureen at the canteen (she said *OK*) and the speech tag informs about the pragmatic force of the utterance.

Narrator's speech tags only commenting on the manner of speaking are illustrated below.

22)   Laura said thoughtfully

23)   Maureen replied, her voice lifting from her usual dejected tone

24)   Laura exclaimed

25)   Laura said ruefully

In general, speech tags of the FD in the first chapter of *Faith* tend to refer to the activity that characters engage in or code the phonetic quality of speech. These provide extra information about the intended meaning that the narrator knows and communicates.

5. Some pragmatic aspects of speech in FD

Intention and interpretation in context constitute one of the main research agenda of linguistic pragmatics. This outlook is also embraced by the research programme of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1991, 2008), where all meaning is treated as ultimately pragmatic, i.e., arising only in the minds of the people that communicate. Both linguistic pragmatics and Cognitive Linguistics in general place meaning in the centre of attention.

The FD of the first chapter of *Faith* certainly contains some features of a naturally occurring conversation. They are: variable choice of register, personalised style, banter and indirectness. The FD of chapter one of *Faith* begins rather abruptly with an exchange between Laura and Donna Ferguson. The latter works at the prison canteen. The low register of Donna's opening utterance, *Dried-up auld fuckwit*, matches the language one expects to hear in prison. But Laura's response, *I may be old and dried-up but broccoli keeps my wits sharp and my body slim*, suggests she is educated, knows it is good to eat vegetables and can respond to Donna in a manner that is non-confrontational, yet self-aware. Lesley Pearse makes sure that Maureen's, the other character's use of language is stylized and unique, too. She is Laura's companion in prison. The way she 'speaks' points to her lower social position and Scottish accent: *I didnae*, *you was innocent*, *I haven't got it in you*, *an auld pal*, *Aye, I done what you said, her pretty wee face,*

with a second wean on the way. Interestingly, Laura's formal and educated register matches her presumed innocence and good character.

Banter (cf. Leech, 1983) is made use of too, for example:

26)   Us auld fuckwits should stick together!

It allows people to validate close relations. Being seemingly very impolite, interlocutors actually point to how good friends they are to allow for behaviour that would otherwise be unacceptable to use with other people.

Indirectness is still another important theme discussed within linguistic pragmatics (Leech, 1983; Tannen, 1977). It refers to such type of hinting that leaves much room for interpretation and is considered polite. As Tannen (1977, p. 7) says, people are more concerned with the effects of what they say than the content of their messages so they tend to avoid saying things directly. Instead of telling the truth, being orderly, precise, relevant and matter-of-fact (cf. Grice, 1975), they tend to focus more on maintaining companionship, avoiding imposing, being tactful, generous or modest (cf. Leech, 1983). Such strategies are face saving, safer and polite but they may lead to communication problems within and across different professions, ages, genders and cultures. An example of such hinting instead of putting across a message directly is provided below:

27)   a) Let's drop in on Oliver tonight!
       b) Why?
       a) All right, we don't have to go. (Tannen, 1977, p. 8)

[27a] was a genuine suggestion, but [27b] presumed that her/his interlocutor had some hidden agenda so preferred to request clarification. However, after hearing [27b] the first interlocutor did not accept the utterance at face value either but interpreted it as a refusal of the offer-suggestion.

Any interpretation process takes place against an active frame. The concept of *frame* (Fillmore, 2006) designates the presence of affect, assumptions, script (Shank & Abelson, 2013), background schema (Arbib, 1992), simultaneous activation of and ranking for salience of multiple knowledge domains (Langacker, 1987, 1991, 2008).

The FD of chapter one of *Faith* does not contain examples of language use that would depend on the hinting mentioned above. On the one hand, the situation of prison in-mates Maureen and Laura described in chapter one requires honesty and the meaning needs to be communicated swiftly in order to support camaraderie. On the other hand, the conversation between Laura and Maureen seems to be quite intense, i.e. without much time spent on only maintaining social relations.

The chat they are having seems unnatural in this respect and one possible explanation is that on such and other occasions a FD constitutes a narrative strategy that masquerades a real conversation.

6. Conclusions

The present work has analysed how Lesley Pearse used fictional dialogue to symbolise processes and strategies used in real life conversation. It was demonstrated that the reading of a FD involves fictional agents that mediate between the actual writer and reader in the process of meaning construal. The concept of one paragraph together with inverted commas used around fragments of speech was compared to the idea of a conversational move as discussed by Weiner and Goodenough (1977). A preference to present the language producer's point of view, typically favoured by novelists, was contrasted with an option to represent the listener's reaction to the use of language form. The latter, however, was argued to take too much time. Moreover, focussing on both viewpoints and additionally inviting readers to switch between the speaker's and listener's distinct perspectives constantly would be unfeasible from the processing point of view. The so--called intonation unit as a correlate of a single act of consciousness-attention was demonstrated to be significantly longer in the FD of *Faith* though the mode number of words per utterance (4) testifies to generally good writer's intuition regarding how conversations are structured in this respect. The FD dialogue includes no utterances that are used in real-life conversations to manage the flow of speech. Topics that depend on the activation of schemas and interlocutor's signals tend to flow naturally in the FD of the first chapter of *Faith*. Speech tags add extra information on the quality of speech, accompanied gestures and activity. The analysed FD contains examples of banter and stylised use of language for different characters. Indirectness tends to be avoided, though, for the reason that in this case (prison chat between inmates) it is not indirect hinting of one's intentions but a swift process of communication that matters more. All in all, Lesley Pearse has applied a number of strategies to create an illusion of a real-life conversation. It must be stressed that the particular construal of talk as represented in the FD in the analysed sample depends on the selective use of signals and hints, which in turn have the potential to trigger readers' mental simulations and illusion of real talk. Last, it should be stressed that a FD, also the sample analysed here is not merely constructed as representation of reality. Perhaps even more importantly it constitutes the writer's narrative strategy. Such an outlook on the role of a FD is certainly a topic worth investigating as a follow up of this paper.

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